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In Begin's Court

It is now three weeks since President Sadat made his historic journey to Jerusalem and already the contours of conflict in the Middle East look as if they have solidified again. The Arab states that might have rallied to Sadat's support – Jordan, Tunisia and Saudi Arabia – have been prevented from doing so by the lack of any Israeli response, while in Tripoli four other Arab countries – Syria, Libya, Algeria and South Yemen – together with the PLO have firmly taken up a 'rejectionist' line (even if not a hard enough one to please Iraq). These divisions in the Arab world are not, of course, new – though their expression has grown a good deal sharper over the past few weeks. In itself that is hardly anything for Israel or Premier Begin to pine over; the vision of Cairo giving Arab ambassadors 24 hours to pack their bags may even be viewed in Jerusalem as an unexpected bonus arising from Mr Sadat's visit. But inactivity is not a long-term strategy. That is certainly something that Mr Callaghan and Dr Owen told Mr Begin in London this week and it is also something that the US Secretary of State, Mr Cyrus Vance, will presumably be reminding the Israeli government of when he arrives in Jersusalem next week. Will such counsels prevail? Perhaps the best that can be said is that they must. For somehow or other Israel *has* to be persuaded that some act of reciprocity is now in her own long-term interests.

It is in her interests, first of all, because there can be no future for Israel as the *doppelgänger* of South Africa in the international community. Whatever he did not manage to achieve by his pilgrimage to Jerusalem, President Sadat has at least brought about a seismic shift in the rest of the world's view of the Arab-Israeli conflict. For long the intransigence boot seemed to be on the Arab foot; now, inevitably, it looks as if it is being worn in Jerusalem. If President Sadat can with a single gesture in effect 'recognise' Israel, is there no way in which Mr Begin can move in a similar direction on the question of the Palestinians, even if that means drawing a perhaps not wholly valid distinction between the PLO as a military and a political entity?

Secondly, however, and perhaps more important, the stakes in the Arab world are now very high indeed. If President Sadat is to deflect the attacks now being made upon him, he needs to demonstrate – not least to Saudi Arabia – that by going to Jerusalem he did not misjudge either the nature of his moment or the mood of his old adversary. The longer that bold stroke of his is left looking like a one-way-street initiative, the greater the force and support that will be lent to his critics within the Arab world. The fact that next week's Cairo conference is taking place with as yet no supporting Arab players at all should be a sufficient warning to the Israelis of the dangers of continuing with their present policy of no concessions.

'Concessions', of course, is an easy word – but add to it the necessary adjective 'territorial' and it becomes a far more daunting concept. Yet the time has arrived when Israel's friends must tell her that conquest cannot bestow a lasting right to annexation or defence security a permanent argument for military occupation. In Sinai, on Gaza, at Sharm el Sheikh – but above all on the West Bank – even the passage of ten years cannot make Israeli's present frontiers juridically defensive. Something has got to give and it would at least be a start if Mr Begin, instead of talking pointlessly about a separate peace with Egypt, were to announce before next week's Cairo conference that the policy of 'settlements' is at an end.

Naturally, no one would deny that any fresh adjustment of borders between Israel and her neighbours is bound to turn into a protracted and agonising business; but it is surely better, not least from Israel's point of view, that the painful process of negotiation should start with an Arab world in which Sadat's policies can be seen to have been vindicated rather than one in which both he and his imaginative initiative have been successfully discredited. It is certainly an odd twist to the history of the entire conflict that that choice should now effectively be in Mr Begin's hands. But it is; and Israel's friends above all should do their utmost to see that he does not muff it.

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Spotlight on Politics

James Fenton

The Crown Agents Debate

Sir Harold Wilson (*Brrring-Brrring*. 'Hullo, Spotlight?' 'Yup'. 'This is Sir Harold Wilson's solicitors. We understand you are planning to write an article about Sir Harold.' 'Nope.' 'Well, we just wanted to say that if you *were* to write an article about Sir Harold, and if it did contain anything defamatory, we would of course feel obliged to sue you and your paper for fifty zillion squillion shaillion quidderoos. Okay?' 'Yup.' 'Byeee!') made a very interesting speech in Monday's debate on the Crown Agents' scandal. (*Brrring-brrring*. 'Hullo sorry to bother you again. That phrase "very interesting" – Sir Harold does feel that it should read "very very interesting indeed, the most interesting speech in the whole debate". Okay?' 'Yup.' 'Byeee!') It was not perhaps the most interesting speech in the debate, but then the standard had been high. It was, indeed, a real parliamentary occasion.

There had been John Mendelson, the Member for Penistone, making a powerful opening speech. Judith Hart then put forward the Government's point of view. She was clearly a little embarrassed to do so. It was not really *her* brief. On the rights and wrongs of an open inquiry she had to take her line from Sam Silkin, who was sitting on the bench beside her. She knew, from a meeting with the Whips that morning, that it would be difficult for the Government to carry its view in the House; and she was aware of the allegations of a further cover-up. And yet the argument was not that simple. For instance, if the demand was that heads should roll, a public tribunal under the 1921 Act would make prosecutions less rather than more likely, since it practically never happens that a witness for such a public tribunal is afterwards arraigned. It is considered difficult for such a person to receive a fair trial, after all the publicity. Then there was the argument, which held some weight with her, that a public tribunal would damage the present-day interests of the Crown Agents.

She was awkwardly placed. It was she who had revealed the scandal in the first place. Now she was being cast in the role of husher-up. When Tom Litterick got to his feet and said 'most carefully' that she appeared to be wishing to perpetuate the conspiratorial nature of the investigation, which would, by definition, doctor the results, Mrs Hart's temper flared. Some of us, she said angrily, have known about the matter for years, whereas others only heard about it last Thursday. How can you, Litterick, you pompous twerp (she *appeared* to be saying), accuse me of wanting anything covered up, when I've been at this game for *years*.

And it has indeed been a very long affair. There was a great blast from the past when the next speaker, Richard Wood, began. Wood is a real ancient monument. Lord Halifax's younger son, he began his political career with as large a silver spoon as could possibly fit his mouth. When Heath gave Sir Alec the Foreign Office in 1970, he allowed the old boy free rein in making his subordinate appointments. Sir Alec, it was felt, would have done well to appoint Sir Bernard Braine to Overseas Development; instead he chose this charming, upright, devoutly Anglican, evensong-attending clot, whose speech on Monday went roughly as follows. Look, he said, I know I'm a clot; I've behaved clottishly; I've even been grossly misleading on the subject; however, I'm frightfully sorry I'm such a clot, and I hope you'll forgive me.

There was no way the House could work up much animus against this line of argument Audrey Wise had a go. She pointed out that the Stevenson Report (the earlier investigation into the Crown Agents) had said:

> Although we cannot say that any significant damage has been done we cannot in view of these defects and associated risks recommend the continuance of the Crown Agents with their present status, composition and range of functions.

And yet Wood, in summarising the (then unpublished) report in the House, had said:

> Briefly, the committee found that the interests of the Crown Agents' principals and others concerned would be best served by the continuation of the whole range of services which the Crown Agents provide.

How, asked Mrs Wise, could those two statements be reconciled? Wood provided a glib answer and then said (charmingly – in a debate about public accountability) that if Mrs Wise was unsatisfied they could perhaps meet outside and go through his statement and the Stevenson Report together. 'I *can read*,' said a frustrated Mrs Wise. 'The honourable lady can read,' said Wood, 'I can read, and we can both read together later'. This formulation had the gentle firmness of the Halifax household's nanny.

It was when Wood urged Mrs Hart to change her mind and to make the inquiry public that the Government realised their cause was lost. Michael Foot was annoyed, and so was Mrs Hart, not so much at the outcome as at the fact that they had allowed themselves to be placed in such a position at all. Labour had no reason to reproach itself for its handling of the affair. It was ridiculous that they should now seem to be on the defensive. The speaker who set the seal on the Government's defeat was Sir Harold Wilson.

Five minutes before the debate he had dropped in on Mrs Hart in order to check up on a few dates, but he had not let on exactly what he was going to say. He therefore caused something of a stir by announcing his belief 'that there is a strong case – to put it no higher than that – for a public inquiry'. Somehow one does not associate Sir Harold with openness (*Brrring-brrring*. 'Watch it, matey. Okay?' 'Yup'. 'Byeee!') or with the vigorous pursuit of open government. Nor is it common for him to look back on his own record with anything other than a sense of justification. What then was he up to?

The main thrust of his speech was a defence of Mrs Hart. She had come to him in 1972 with allegations (they were at this stage only allegations of corruption – no one yet had any inkling of the full extent of the mismanagement) and a request for advice as to what to do to bring the matter into the open. But there had been a closing of ranks by those involved – Sir Harold would not say conspiracy, unless of course (he added) it turned out that there *had* been one. Labour's legal advisers had also made every objection: they had said that Mrs Hart could face defamation actions for 'thousands of pounds, selling her house – the lot'. (This is apparently true, although I cannot discover who gave this advice. It was said, however, that even if Mrs Hart chose to raise the matter in the House she would not necessarily be protected.) There was also a question of Royal Prerogative. But most interestingly of all, there was the co-operation between the Law Officers on either side of the House. It was here that Sir Harold was most scathing (to the fury of a Labour lawyer to whom I spoke afterwards, and to the apparent embarrassment of Mrs Hart).

What interests me is: why is Sir Harold so keen to discredit the Law Officers on both sides of the House? It is, after all, the latest of a series of curiously indiscreet outbursts, which all seem somewhat defensive in character. It began with the famous warning against South African agents. It went on to include MI 5. The implication on Monday's speech was that the Law Officers worked together as a clique, to frustrate the legitimate aims of Parliament. It was strong stuff. Was it simply an attempt to restore a tattered reputation, by posing as Mr Clean? Or was it rather to do with some as yet undisclosed row between the Law Officers and Sir Harold? Everyone is mystified by Sir Harold, and everything he does seems to compound the mystery. The squid's ink continues to exude from his agitated form. Just what is it that he has on his conscience? (*Brrring-brrring, brrring-brrring...*)

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Christopher Mayhew

The Case for European PR

A certain amount of humbug is essential for the smooth working of parliamentary democracy, and it would be priggish to expect pro-European Tory MPs to explain fully in public their reasons for opposing the regional list system for the European elections. In private they will tell you these reasons readily enough – 'Thin end of the wedge for Westminster' and/or 'Can't afford to tangle with Margaret' – but since neither helps their reputations as keen Europeans, they fall back, for public purposes, on some stunningly implausible rationalisations.

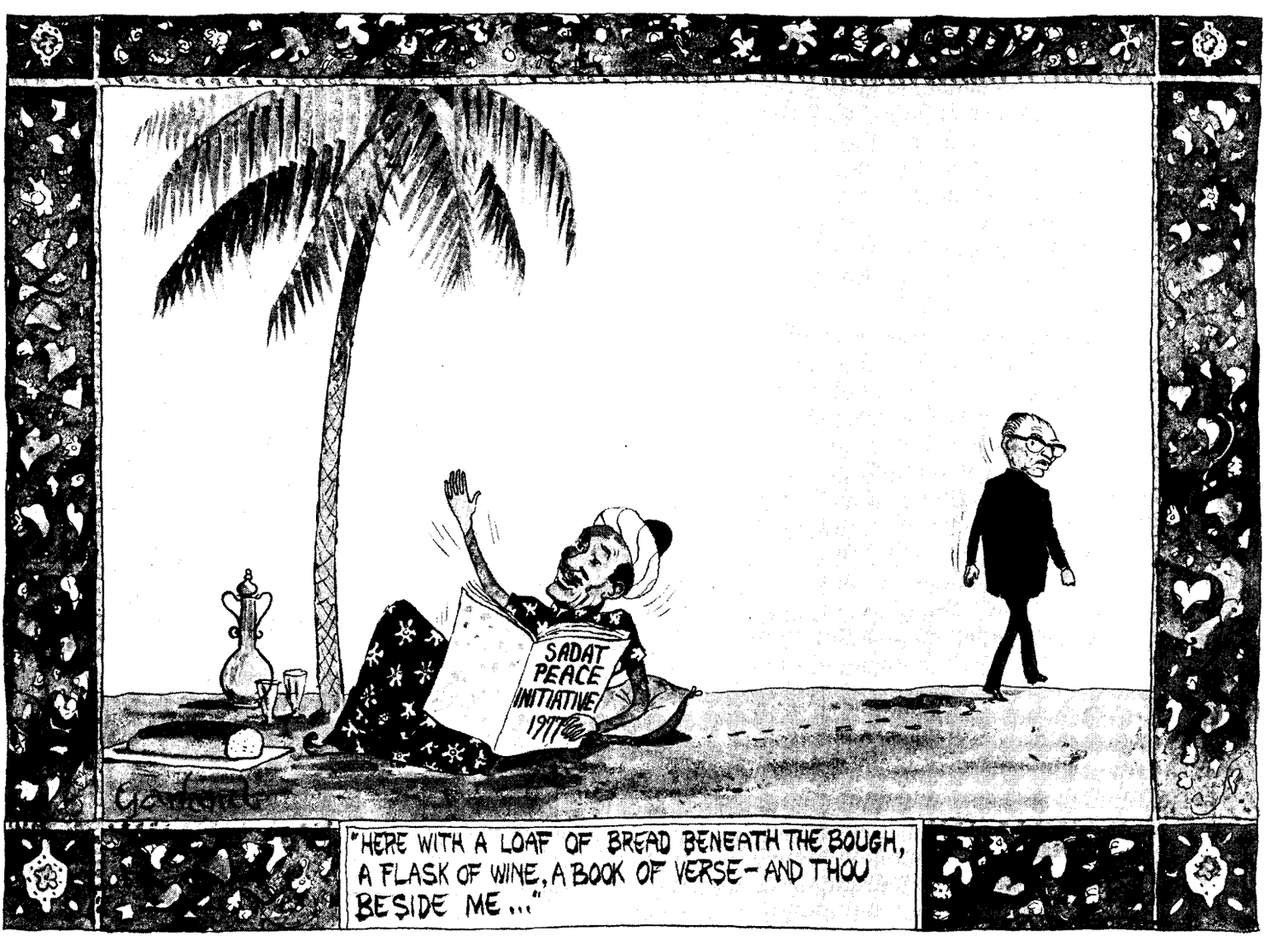
The best-known of these is that proportional representation is too unfamiliar and complicated for the British (manageable, that is, only by those intellectual giants the Irish, or by people with long experience of democratic practices like the Spaniards and Greeks). Then there is the argument that European MPs can only serve their constituency properly in one-member constituencies – that is, they can run surgeries – when they are not abroad – for half-a-million constituents but not more. And so on. Hilarious. Ironically, moreover, the genuine, private reason ('thin end of the wedge') is fallacious as well: there is no reason why, if we wanted to, we could not adopt PR for Europe and still use first-past-the-post for Westminster. The case for using PR for Westminster is very strong, but the case for using it for the European Parliament (which does not create governments or legislate) is stronger still. Indeed, it must be doubtful whether British politicians have ever been involved in a controversy in which the arguments of substance were so unevenly balanced.

Today's Tory opponents of electoral reform cannot match the ingenuity of their 19th century predecessors, who thought up the most colourful and plausible arguments for opposing the Great Reform Bill of 1832 (for example – 'Without rotten boroughs, people like William Pitt would never get into Parliament'); but they share the same determination to preserve their electoral privileges in defiance of the wishes and interests of the British people. Public opinion today is rapidly crystallising in favour of reform. The latest ORC poll shows 74 per cent of the British people supporting PR and only 13 per cent opposing it. The poll also asked for agreement or disagreement with the following proposition:

> Many MPs are against changing the voting system because they are afraid of losing their seats.

Seventy per cent agreed with this, only 10 per cent disagreed. A similar question about the Tory and Labour parties produced a similar response. Thus even before the campaign for electoral reform has properly begun, the great majority of British people say they want reform and are aware that many of the MPs who oppose it are humbugs. Bearing in mind that only four years ago practically nobody knew anything about the subject at all, this is a remarkable advance.

The advance will continue. For reasonable, uncommitted people, the case for PR for Europe is unanswerable. The 12 constituencies provided by the regional list system would send a British contingent to the European Parliament which accurately reflected political opinion in every part of the United Kingdom. By contrast, a contingent elected by 'first-past-the-post' would be wildly unrepresentative both of the United Kingdom as a whole and of its different regions. The aberrations of this pernicious system become more and more absurd as the size of constituency increases, so that the anomalies it creates in the House of Commons are only a pale shadow of the ridiculous results it would produce for Europe. Quite apart from disenfranchis-



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ing 5 million Liberal voters, and eliminating Europe's largest Liberal Party from the European Parliament, it would almost certainly produce an absurd unbalance between Tory and Labour European MPs. It could well produce a virtual clean sweep for Labour in Wales, for the SNP in Scotland and for the Tories in England. In short it would distort the whole political balance of the European Parliament, leading our partners in the EEC to conclude, fairly enough, that the British Tory and Labour parties were both mad and bad.

There is, also, of course, the question of delay. If the Boundary Commissioners have to define 81 new single-member constituencies, and if objections to their decisions are permitted, there can, as was made clear in Brussels this week, be no hope of holding the elections by May-June 1978.

To avoid this, some Tories are calmly proposing that the two front benches should do the work of the Boundary Commissioners for them. Why not let the Tory and Labour Whips decide the boundaries, and simply tack a new schedule on to the Bill and push it through? If the Liberals complain, they could be offered one or two boundary adjustments. Perhaps Russell Johnston in Scotland or Geraint Howells in Wales might be allowed an outside chance of election. All other objections would be ruled out. Then the May/June deadline could be met. The snag in this proposal is not, of course, that it is immoral and undemocratic, but that it does not suit the Government. Far better, in the view of Ministers, if PR is lost, to put the election off, and to put it off for as long as possible. But even if the elections are postponed, and Boundary Commissioners are brought in and do their work well, the new constituencies will inevitably be messy and artificial. Unlike the regional list constituencies, they will correspond with no regional loyalties or interests, no existing party organisations, no radio or television areas. Few party activists, let alone voters, would know what the boundaries were.

A good illustration of the basic weakness of 'first-past-the-post' is the fact that even its most ardent supporters concede that it cannot be used in Northern Ireland. Here, everyone agrees, there must be some kind of proportional representation. Otherwise the Catholic minority will, in effect, be disenfranchised. But why should justice be done only to the Catholic minority in Northern Ireland? Why must we disenfranchise the Tory minority in Wales and the North, the Labour minority in the South East and South West, and the Liberal minority throughout the whole country?

How do Labour MPs compare in all this with the Tory MPs? On the whole, favourably. Some, like Michael Foot, trot out the Tory arguments about 'familiarity', but fewer Labour MPs overall propose to vote against PR and those who do are honest about their reasons. After listening to much double-talk from Tory Euro-traitors at the recent Congress of the European Movement, I was positively delighted, in a TV discussion with Joe Ashton, to hear him say frankly that he was against the EEC, against the European Parliament and against PR as 'the thin end of the wedge'.

But Labour opponents of PR must make up their minds. Do they want to kick the Liberals in the teeth or do they want the Lib-Lab pact to continue? Because – despite a lot of outsiders' comments to the contrary – they cannot do both. If they think that the pact has served its purpose and that the Government can now rely on the SNP; or if they think that the Government should go to the country in the spring anyhow, they can vote against the regional list system with clear minds. But don't let them think that if they and their colleagues throw this particular punch at the Liberal Party, the party will then allow David Steel and his colleagues to continue propping up their Government afterwards.

At the time of writing, 113 Liberal Associations throughout the country have forwarded resolutions to the party chairman declaring that unless there is a majority of at least 100 for the regional list system from within the Parliamentary Labour Party, a Special Assembly should be called to end the pact. A similar resolution was recently passed by the party council by an overwhelming majority. Moreover David Steel has conceded that if the Labour MPs do fail to produce a substantial majority, a Special Assembly will be unavoidable; and also that if the Assembly votes to end the pact the pact will be ended.

Thus the revolt of the Liberal rank-and-file is not 'moonshine' (as James Fenton recently described it) but presents a clear challenge to Labour opponents of the regional list system. If they want the pact to continue, they must abstain on Clause 3 and not vote against it.

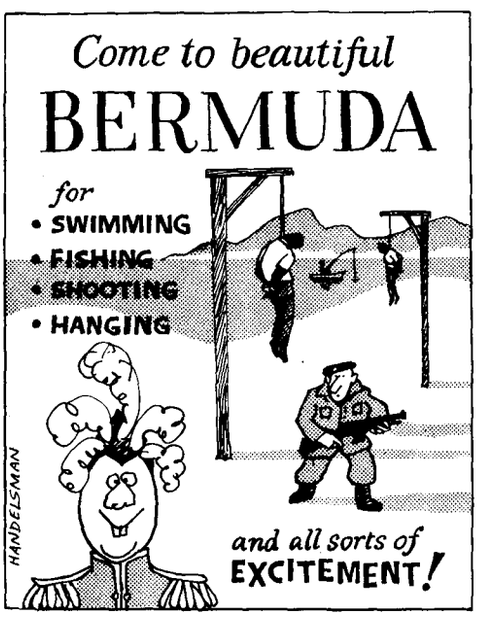
If, however, the vote is lost, for whatever reason, and the election postponed, there will still be substantial compensations for Liberals. The British people already dislike the biased electoral system which the big parties fasten on them. They already know that on this issue these parties are hypocritical and corrupt. Now, on Europe, they will have seen these parties actually depriving them of their right to vote. Inevitably, they will start challenging MPs rights to decide the manner in which they themselves are elected. They will become seriously concerned, and then angry. At long last, the conditions will have been created for a Liberal breakthrough.

Corinna Adam

By Habit and Repute

Some of my best friends are common law wives. Or so they think. So, at any rate, they would claim to be, if things went wrong. None of them is stupid, but they are all mistaken. When it comes to the point, their future – and in particular their rights to property – will be decided by a man. Not necessarily the man they live with. A magistrate or a judge will bring his special prejudices to bear on the question – or indeed, his early morning ill-temper, or his views on the lifestyle of his own daughter. He will rule as he thinks fit, undaunted by precedent.

It is one of the curiosities of English life that everyone believes in precedent (just as they believe, for example, in the false saw that 'the greater the truth, the greater the libel') or as they believe in the concept of common law wives. Common Law only means what we all agree on, but have never bothered to write down: and so it is infinitely variable. In Scotland, people are 'deemed' to be married 'by habit and repute'; south of the Border, it isn't so. But partly because everyone believes that it *is* (and partly of course because it is interesting *per se*) an amazing number of people seem to have followed, quite closely, last week's case of *Davis* v. *Johnson*. Miss Davis's success – that is, the ruling that she was entitled to throw her violent lover out of their joint flat – has been hailed on all sides. 'A Mistresses' Charter', said some; 'A Triumph for the Libbers', others. In fact, it was neither. All that was established was that Mr Johnson should not be allowed to live in Miss Davis's flat and hit her when he felt so inclined. (The flat, it should be remembered, was originally allocated to Miss Davis as an unmarried woman with a child. Mr Johnson became the joint tenant at a later date.)



Take Eleanor, who is 68. The best part of 50 years ago, Henry seduced her. (According to family lore, it happened on Hampstead Heath.) She must have assumed he was married (she was a student in his History class and he was ten years older than her). So as to avoid upsetting her strictly correct parents, the affair was kept secret until she was at least 30. We all wondered as children, why Cousin Eleanor wasn't married: we weren't told the true story until we separately reached 21. None of us ever met Henry's wife: there were, and still are

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Brontëish stories about her being mad and locked up somewhere. (Which is all supposed to justify Henry's behaviour, these past 50 years.) Henry and Eleanor, between them have bought his old family home: and in it, Eleanor has acted as grandmother to two of his by-blows. But when Henry dies, the young mother of his children could get rid of Eleanor without too much trouble.

Katherine is 40. She is divorced from her first husband, and now lives in a somewhat formal Celtic society where most people assume that David, the father of her two small children, is her legal spouse. He isn't; she finds it hard to explain why. All she says is that she'd 'feel a bit silly, getting married after all this time'. David and she live off their wits: they are professionals with freelance incomes. This week, Katherine was having to come to terms with her unmarried – sinful, even – status at the funeral of a much-loved aunt. As it happened, nobody was nearly as disapproving as she feared. It sounds like a happy ending: but since she and David are casual about money, she could end up with very few rights: were he to die, for instance, she would have no personal claim on his estate: it is even doubtful if his unacknowledged children would have such a claim.

Anna will soon be 30. She fell in love with Michael when they were both 22, the children of broken suburban marriages. They agreed that the only way to avoid that sort of misery was not to get married at all. They make, though, an elegant and in many ways conventional couple. So far as the outside world is concerned, they might just as well be married. Anna wears a large ring on her wedding finger, to indicate that she is not available: if they decided to have a child, they would almost certainly get married. But part of their competence and fair-mindedness consists in knowing that if they part, neither will be selected as the victim. Their house is owned by a Housing Trust: they are 'co-tenants' of it. Looked at coolly, they are as well organised as one could hope. But, after six years, it still hurts that Anna's father's first reaction to their plan to live together was to telephone his solicitor – so as to disinherit her.

Jane's father would have liked to do the same. She and Edward have been living together now for a year; she is 20, and hasn't lived with her parents except on holiday since she was 13. Her father has such a peripatetic job that she feels she scarcely knows him: she was astounded when he suddenly assumed he had a right to tell her no nice girl behaved like that. It is a strictly half-and-half arrrangement ('It's quite simple, you just look at the bills and divide by two'). Except, of course, that the flat is in his name, not hers. And when Jane thinks about the future, a possible future in which Edward might not figure, she says 'I suppose by the time I'm 30 I might buy a house.' Of her own.

So, in reality, none of the basic ground rules has been changed. With half a century between them, all my friends suffer from the same misapprehensions. They all subscribe to the pathetic fallacy that 'it can't happen to me'; or if not, they suffer from the twin disease, which means believing that 'whatever happens, *he* wouldn't behave that badly.' Yes, it can. And yes, he will.

John Griffith

Crown Agents and Civil Servants

Two hundred pages of the Fay Report (*H.C. 48 of 1977-78*) are now to be followed by another inquiry. Crown Agents are servants of the Crown but not civil servants and a kind of cover-up is beginning to descend like a mountain mist. Not a covering of silence in which rules of universal non-communication prevail. But a finding of reasons which are structural, about 'accountability' and 'status'; a movement away from persons towards abstract nouns, a system at fault not people.

Was the Senior Crown Agent told by a Minister in the early 1960s: 'You are on your own'? Certainly he told his staff they were and the proposition 'was carried in the minds of many to the extreme point of meaning that the Government would repudiate liability for the Crown Agents' own debts'. So, on this theory, they set about saving themselves to avoid redundancy. But in April 1970 when Sir Claude Hayes was Senior Crown Agent he noted the Government's view that the Government would have the ultimate financial responsibility. But he argued against that view because with it would go some right to conrol.

The Minister (that is, Mrs Hart when first in that office) came to appreciate in early 1970 'the anomalous constitutional position' when she asked that the Crown Agents be told to try a certain procedure and 'was promptly told that she could not give orders to the Crown Agents, and this puzzled her'. So she asked for a look to be taken at the constitutional relationship and 'officials went away and said yes, they would look into this'. A little later she said that she proposed to consult her colleagues about Crown Agents. Then, very soon, the Government fell.

And Mr Challis who made major investment decisions for the Crown Agents.

> His subordinates were accountable to him but he was, in practice, accountable to no one. In theory he was accountable to the Chairman, but the Chairman exerted no effective control over him, and joined forces with him to repel any accountability to external bodies.

Then there was that status problem. The Crown Agents had been 'aptly described as the smile left by the Cheshire cat'. Their precise status, said a Deputy Secretary in 1969, was 'doubtful' and the Treasury's researches (no less) 'led them to pronounce the Crown Agents' status to be 'obscure'. By 1970 a legal adviser at the FCO thought they were an 'emanation of the Crown' which would have to bear the ultimate responsibility. And then, again in 1970.

> The Ministry's note illustrates how the constitutional problem had come to dominate their thinking: financial risks were touched on but as a reason for re-examining the Crown Agents' status and not as a problem in themselves.

And so the civil service mind worked on the affair, contemplating constitutional relationships, pondering on accountability, considering the complexities of status, even (of course) deciding that the Crown Agents were '*sui generis*'. And so today, much of the Departmental and Ministerial talk is of these niceties, these peculiarities, as if they had something to do with the catastrophe, with the failures of men in public office.

Is this wisdom after the event? I think not. In the *Sunday Times* of 19 April 1970 was published an article by Charles Raw and other financial journalists under the heading 'Crown Agents: Who Carries the Final Buck?'. The Fay Report says that this was a well researched article, its facts accurate and its comments fair. Certainly it raised many of the fundamental questions.

And on 5 August 1971 an article in the *Guardian* by Charles Raw and Lindsey Vincent occupied two pages and was accompanied by a front page statement describing the Crown Agents as the biggest force in the City's money market after the Bank of England and, again, asking all the real questions. On the same day, Lord Selkirk in the Lords asked if the Government were satisfied with the Crown Agents' investment policy. The Government spokesman said that he had no reason to suspect that the *Guardian* article was substantially inaccurate, but that he needed time to consider it. In November the Stevenson Committee began its inquiry but, said the Minister, 'I do not think we thought of the Stevenson Committee as a kind of inquisition but as a means by which I could be advised on *this awkward constitutional point*' [my emphasis].

At the end of the day which lies several months ahead, it may be that no amount of puzzlement over constitutional accountability of juridical status will be able to conceal the fact that, whatever may have been the shortcomings (or worse) of the Crown Agents, once again the senior civil service has failed to do its job.

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R. W. Johnson

South Africa's Inconclusive Election

On 30 November Mr Vorster's National Party won its eighth successive South African election with 64.8 per cent of the (white) vote and 155 parliamentary seats out of 165. Given that the NP have already held power for 29 years and that the country's new constitution will enable the governing party to name 17 or 18 of a further 20 appointed MPs, one might suppose that this was one election truly meriting the term 'conclusive'. One would suppose wrongly, however. True the monolithic super-patriotism of the NP's campaign enabled Vorster utterly to trounce his electoral opposition to Left and Right, and left the Government holding all the cards for the next deal. But the electorate is none the wiser whether the game is to be poker or bridge; and most Nationalists share this uncertainty – particularly since quite a few other games were in progress during the election.

First, there was the little matter of the new constitution with its plan for three separate parliaments (and premiers) for Whites, Coloureds and Indians under a more powerful president, to be elected indirectly by a predominantly white electoral college. This combination of presidentialism, executive appointees in the legislature, and at least the appearance of power-sharing, suggests strongly that the Government is taking steps to immunise itself against pressures from the white electorate in order to force through unpopular reforms. But how the new constitution could or would work remained delightfully vague. The fullest exposition came not from Vorster but from Connie Mulder, the powerful Interior and Information Minister. Each parliament, he said, would have complete say over the affairs of its own people. In such fields for example, he indicated airily, as education. Coloureds could have integrated schools if they liked, whites could have segregated ones.

The fact that integration was, on this basis, happily unworkable could not entirely reassure NP hard-liners, for whom the slightest concession towards integration is taken to imply the end of the white race. And where did such a principle leave the Bantu Affairs Department (abbreviated, wonderfully, to BAD)? After all, BAD's Minister, M. C. Botha, and his deputy, Andries Treurnicht, had provoked the Soweto explosion precisely by their insistent imposition of their pet educational policies on the urban blacks.

Indeed, where did the whole plan leave urban blacks? They were the Great Unmentioned of the new constitution, a grotesque omission which lent a whole new dimension to the term 'silent majority'. It was clear that this gap would have to be filled in after the election. It was also uncomfortably clear that it could not be filled in without a fundamental decision in principle about the continuation of the apartheid system. The system rests four square upon the notion that blacks are citizens of their various tribal homelands. The denial of political rights to blacks in the 'white' urban areas is justified by the (ridiculous) contention that they are but temporary sojourners there. This contention is enforced primarily by the system of influx control and the Pass Laws which result in half-a-million blacks being punished annually for failing to produce a Pass immediately upon police request. Any move to dismantle the Pass Laws or, *a fortiori*, to accept blacks as permanent residents in the urban areas would thus undermine the entire Verwoerdian rationale of the apartheid system. As such the issue was far too delicate to risk in an election campaign. For the hard-liners, though, the portents were clearly ominous. Even before the election, plans had been announced for the electrification of the Soweto township. But BAD could smell a rat. One doesn't spend millions bringing electricity to the temporary dwellings of temporary dwellers . . . So, mysteriously, the finalisation of the electrification project suffered endless delays, to the utter fury of the business community and the NP's reforming wing. The South African Foundation, the semi-official propaganda organisation closely linked with Mulder's Information Ministry, actually bought newspaper space to condemn the project's inexplicable delay, arguing that reactionary obfuscation of this sort could only dishearten South Africa's friends abroad.

All of which put BAD's Minister, M. C. Botha, in an untenable position, for he was under equally strong and opposite pressure from the NP Right and from Treurnicht, his deputy. Just as the election was called, Botha announced a far-reaching review of government policies with regard to urban blacks. The review might lead to the 'streamlining' of influx control though, he emphasised, this would 'obviously' take place within the established framework of the apartheid system. He would, he said, give details later. A few days later he jumped ship, announcing his retirement from politics. Vorster quickly rushed to smooth the situation with praise for Botha whose retirement, he said, 'would leave a void that would be difficult to fill'. The understatement was almost painful. The explosive question was now posed of the promotion or demotion of Botha's deputy, the arch-reactionary Treurnicht, leading spokesman of the die-hards. Vorster took charge – with Treurnicht – of the continuing discussions of influx control with the Bantustan leaders.

With Botha's resignation, the ball was out of the scrum. It was again Mulder who picked it up first. In a major speech on the approaching independence of the Bophuthatewana homeland he declared that any homeland citizen who wished could renounce his homeland citizenship after independence and re-apply for South African citizenship. Although Mulder refused to disclose the criteria on which the Government would grant such applications, he was clearly announcing a total abnegation of the apartheid system. If all urban blacks could apply for South African citizenship, then the whole notion of them as temporary residents was lost forever. The Government would then have to face up to the question of what political rights *this* group of citizens were to be accorded. Discussion of the powers for black municipal councils in the townships took on a new significance.

A few weeks later another bombshell followed. The Lehowa Chief Minister, Dr Phatudi, announced that he and other homeland leaders had honoured the agreement of Vorster and the departing M. C. Botha to the abolition of the hated Pass. Instead, the 8 million urban blacks would be issued – by their homelands, not the Government – with travel documents which, however, they would not actually have to carry with them. The whole point of the Pass Laws had been that a black in an urban area not actually carrying his Pass about his person was *ipso facto* in breach of the law. How the police could hope to enforce this more flexible system, or why the homelands should wish to limit the number of travel documents they granted, was left unexplained. Dr Phatudi notably failed to announce that the new system had the agreement of Treurnicht. Treurnicht himself said nothing.

Shortly before the election he had his revenge. BAD staggered almost everyone by announcing its complete withdrawal from the Soweto electrification project – which thus lapsed. Meanwhile, BAD circulars were sent out to the homeland chiefs insisting that the Government's ultimate objective was still the settlement of all urban blacks in the homelands. The circular coincided almost exactly with the announcement by Sen. Horwood, the Finance Minister, of a R250m. (£152m.) housing programme for blacks, coloureds and Indians, which Horwood linked to the concession of mortgage rights to remove impediments to full home-ownership for urban blacks. The only way of reconciling this with BAD's policy would be by blacks taking the somewhat unlikely step of joining the affluent ranks of second-home owners. Second homes without electricity, presumably . . .

M. C. Botha's resignation opened up another game, too, for it meant that there was a vacant deputy-leadership of the NP's dominant Transvaal section going begging, something not to be ignored even in mid-election campaign. The election (it might be well to recall) had been supposed to be all about standing up to Jimmy Carter. As it progressed, it frequently seemed to be more about another Jimmy – Kruger, the Justice Minister. Even the police at the Biko inquest could not explain Kruger's groundless initial assertion that Biko had gone on hunger strike. Kruger himself couldn't explain it now and attempted, grotesquely, to clown his way out of responsibility – an attitude which led several NP candidates to dissociate themselves from him almost publicly. Kruger's survival in a post-election cabinet was clearly at stake and he grasped hurriedly at the extra insurance of the Transvaal deputy-leadership – perhaps thereby saving his career.

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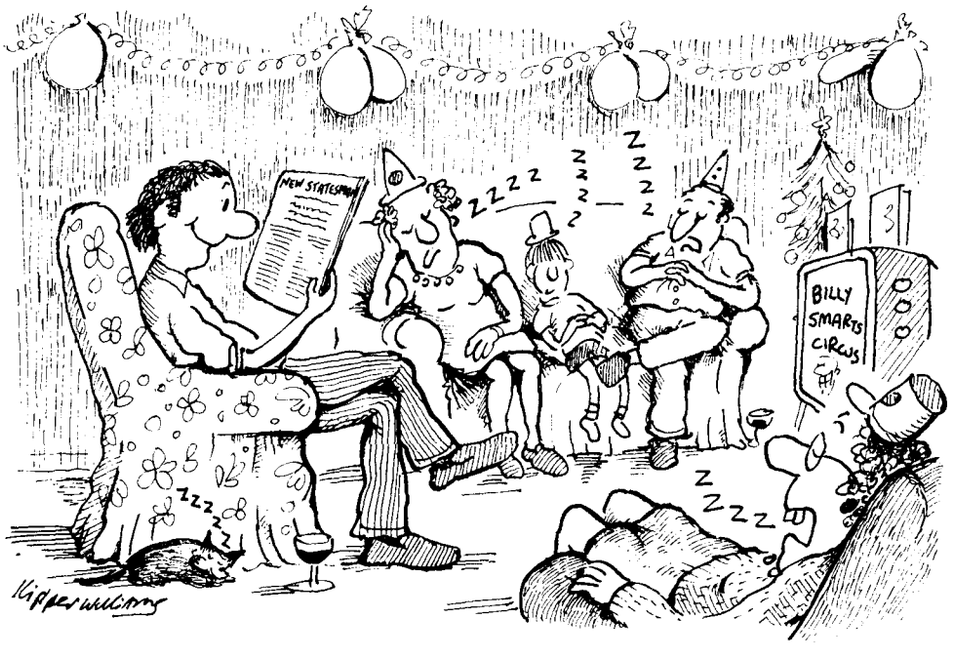
Kruger's elevation left a vacancy on the Transvaal NP's executive committee which Pik Botha, the Foreign Minister, took with the same grateful haste. For all his international status Botha had entirely lacked a base in the party machine – a grave handicap for someone ambitious to succeed Vorster in the premiership. As important, the election as a whole had presented Botha with an opportunity to counter the feeling, generated by his ultra-reformist speeches as ambassador to the US and UN, that to elect him leader would be to run up the white flag to Washington. He took it with both hands, outdoing all others in the vehemence of his anti-American speeches around the country. His effort almost certainly came too late, for Mulder looks wellnigh unstoppable in the approaching succession contest. He is tough, shrewd, holds the confidence of the Right and is the leader of the crucial Transvaal section of the party. It was he who gave clearest definition to the new constitution and, with his speech on citizenship policy, made the most decisive breach in the hard-liners' resistance to change. He, even more than Vorster, is the real victor of this election.

Indeed, even the most important foreign policy statement of the campaign may not have been made by Pik Botha but by Joen Steyn, the Secretary of Commerce, in a speech to the South African-Israel Chamber of Economic Relations. Why not, he urged businessmen from the two countries, go through your list of foreign suppliers and see if you can't ditch them in favour of a South African or Israeli partner? This remarkably aggressive suggestion must be judged against the background of a 437 per cent increase in trade between the two countries in the last five years. Healthy enough, one might suppose, for political instigation to even faster growth to be redundant. But Pretoria is not merely attempting to consolidate a new friendship to counter her growing isolation overall. Any future South African leader – whatever the campaign rhetoric now – will have to deal with Washington in the end. (Mulder, one might note, was far less shrill than Botha in his denunciations of Carter.) The critical arena in the period to come is likely to be in the lobbies of Capitol Hill. And the greater the degree of South African-Israel commercial integration, the more Pretoria may be able to rely on the help of Washington's Zionist lobby – the strongest one in town.

Pretoria will clearly need whatever help she can get. Just a century ago Paul Kruger's beleaguered South African Republic was confronted with growing pressure from the world's greatest imperial state. The British then, like the Americans now, bitterly criticised Pretoria's treatment of its unenfranchised urban masses (the *uitlanders* then, the blacks now). The forces arrayed against the Republic then were so overwhelming that it seemed Kruger must come to terms, must climb down and settle. He didn't – and died, broken, in exile. It may be that his successors won't settle either – that they will refuse to learn from history and thus be condemned to repeat it. But the election rhetoric alone should not lead one to dismiss the possibility that Pretoria's leaders have learnt a little of their own history.



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Roger Omond

Verdict in Court

'They just don't care any more', said a journalist at 11.05 a.m. last Friday. After 14 days of evidence and argument, Pretoria's Chief Magistrate closed the inquest into the death in detention of Steve Biko with a finding that took all of 80 seconds to deliver. Eight hours earlier two members of the Biko family had been detained in a 3 a.m. Special Branch Raid – to be released without explanation 12 hours later and told to leave the Witwatersrand.

It's an old Special Branch tactic to be bloody-minded and give evidence in Afrikaans: the majority of people in court don't speak it and, when the questions are put in English and then translated, it gives them more time to think. The fact that all are sufficiently bilingual to have interrogated Biko in English is ignored. At least the Chief Magistrate, N.J. Prins, was sufficiently considerate to deliver his finding in both English and Afrikaans, which doubled the length of his appearance in court last Friday from 80 seconds to two minutes 40 seconds. Nobody could be held responsible for Biko's death, he said, and then climbed down from behind his desk and back into chambers. The Special Branch's stonewalling tactics had won. The brevity of the findings stunned millions: the more optimistic had hoped for a decision that would implicate the Special Branch; the more cautious expected at least some stern judicial words about the treatment of Biko.

Steve Biko would have been the last to have been surprised by Prins's findings. Just four months ago a magistrate in his home area of King William's Town had not even bothered to adjourn the court before delivering a similar 'no blame' finding into the 'suicide' of Mapetla Mohapi, one of Biko's aides. Today just about all the leaders of the Black Consciousness movement are in detention without trial.

Prins's brief findings have not ended the Biko saga. Police Minister James Kruger ('His death leaves me cold') is going to be sued by the family. Kruger also faces a similar suit from the Mohapi family. Unfortunately the widow, Nohle, is also in detention. And then there is the case of the two or three doctors concerned with examining Biko in Port Elizabeth. Their counsel has still to plead before Prins that the findings should not be forwarded to the Medical and Dental Council for possible further action. The Biko family advocate, Sydney Kentridge, argued that two of them, one Ivor Lang and one Benjamin Tucker, had entered the Special Branch's conspiracy of silence and that they had allowed themselves to be misled and browbeaten. In terms of the law all grounds for possible action by the Medical Council.

'Was it all worth it?' somebody asked last Friday. Yes it was. Even if the magistrate found that nobody could be held responsible despite Kentridge's strong argument that it was one or more of the Eight Special Branch men who had Biko in their custody, at least nobody in South Africa can now plead ignorance of Special Branch behaviour. We know now, as if we didn't know before, that a detainee can be kept naked in a prison cell for three weeks, that he can be deprived of exercise, washing facilities and the right to buy food in direct contradiction of regulations, and that he can be kept handcuffed and in leg irons chained to a grille for more than 48 hours. We also know that he can be allowed to lie in his urine-soaked trousers on urine-soaked mats, while district surgeons don't even suggest a change of clothing, that doctors can miss classic symptoms of brain damage, that when the doctors eventually begin to worry they meekly follow Special Branch orders that he cannot be allowed anywhere near a decent hospital, that even when he is supposed to be under close observation for brain damage he can be moved from a prison hospital back into a police cell, that a doctor can authorise a 700-mile journey overnight without first getting the results of a lumbar puncture, that the same doctor does not check whether the form of transport is the same as that promised by the Special Branch (it wasn't: a Land Rover was substituted for a Quasi-ambulance). We have also learnt that a detainee can be sent naked on his last journey resting on prison mats with a blanket for a pillow, a couple of Special Branch men with no medical training as orderlies, a water container as the sole medicine, that when they reach Pretoria they persist in saying the detainee is shamming, that no medical report accompanies the semi-comatose detainee, that a man hours away from death caused by brain damage can be given a vitamin injection and a drip and that he can be allowed to die alone on a cell floor.

And apart from Sydney Kentridge who, with his legal team, emerged as the heroes of the courtroom, nobody even bothers to comment on this chapter of inhumanity. Not Prins, not Kruger, not the unrepentant Special Branch. There is no word of sorrow or anger by the authorities, not even a suggestion detainees in future won't suffer the same treatment. They just don't care. And that is what South Africa voted for.

Pretoria

Patrick Wintour

The Deferential Union

No country has a longer or more militant tradition of organised agitation by agricultural workers than Britain. The present National Union of Agricultural and Allied Workers is the indirect descendant of Joseph Arch's mid-19th century unionisation of the East Anglian farmworker, one of the first examples of trade union activity anywhere. The union now lives up the Gray's Inn Road in London, unhappy in itself, incohesive, uninfluential and in the midst of a crucial ballot to elect a new general secretary. Every candidate agrees that the union is at a crossroads. It could, for example, go on losing money so fast that in three years it will be gobbled up by the TGWU.

It is not a matter of conserving a piece of labour history; inside the industrial TGWU the distinctive needs of the agricultural worker would be submerged in a giant union which will always put its urban membership and low food prices first. And yet the recent stance of the NUAAW as an independent union has been little more than that of a friendly society. Public knowledge of the union is minimal (many would not know the difference between the NUAAW and the employers' wealthy lobby the National Farmers Union). Of the farmworkers' job even less is understood. The image is of something cheerful and breezy, if spartan. In reality disease from pesticides is endemic and there were 108 farm fatalities in 1976, helping to put the job near the top of the industrial accident league.

Despite their productivity record, the membership receives a basic wage £16 less than the average industrial wage; overtime rates are still not the standard time and a half. The union itself has also been losing money; with the drift from the land the number of subscriptions, which are priced too cheap anyway, dwindle. In 1945 the membership was double the present 70,000. It is now in a self-enforcing downwards spiral.

The present general secretary Reg Bottini took over in 1970. He came into the union via land drainage after being sent to work the land as a pacifist during the second world war. The 70 year-old President Bert Hazell was shaped by the near disastrous effect of the 1923 farmworkers' strike. Under their dual command the union will never strike (indeed it has not struck since 1923) but will instead cling to the statutory wages board made up of eight trade union nominees and eight NFU nominees with five appointees of the Ministry of Agriculture interposed. The union can only argue for higher wages, not extract them by force, which is quite suitable for the principles of a pacifist. Bottini himself is immensely sensitive to criticism such as the 1976 conference's vote of no confidence in head office's efficiency. He is in the process of suing a fellow member of his executive for mis-interpreting that vote. He also has a virulent dislike of the NUAAW's sponsored Tribune MP Joan Maynard to the point of complaining suspiciously that pictures of her in the union journal are too frequent.

But nobody pretends the union's difficulties rest solely with the leadership or that

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the land worker will enter into his inheritance on the arrival of a new general secretary bent on strikes. With the increase in mechanisation and the decline in demand for labour, the farmer and worker often work on a one-to-one basis and come into more frequent and intimate contact. To call a mass strike meeting of one is a little anomalous. It is almost embarrassing to have a third party like the union official become involved in a dispute. The alignment is strengthened by the infiltration into villages of urban sophisticates carrying their copies of *Country Life* under one arm and *Time Out* under the other.

Besides, it is very difficult to organise effective action against 170,000 different employers. At best the union could pull out its limited membership selectively at harvest and seed time, but the length of the production cycle precludes hitting a quick blow. Carrots keep on growing regardless of union rule books. And, as Joseph Arch found out, any concessions granted at harvest time are withdrawn as soon as the crop is safely gathered in. The only two successful organisers for the NUAAW hitherto have been the Kaiser Wilhelm II and Hitler, who forced the British back into agricultural self-sufficiency.

The traditional division in the union is over how practicable the strike weapon would be; the upper hand has always been held by the faction who concede the unique weakness of their bargaining position and who therefore accept the annual arbitration of the wages board. Two recent developments have undermined the arguments of the majority grouping. First, since 1 January all farmworkers now have security of tenure on their tied cottage or the right to be rehoused by the local council. The removal of the fear of eviction, once it percolates down to the farmworker, will make him noticeably less dependent on the farmer's grace and favour. Secondly the Government, without any precedent, are pressing the wages board to revise this year's award downwards. The NUAAW wanted £60 but, as helpless as ever, accepted just over £43 which the Government have decided is unacceptably outside their guidelines. Previously the NUAAW have found it logically difficult to take direct action against the inadequate awards of the wages board since the board is their only shelter from normal collective bargaining under which they would fare infinitely worse. If the Government leans on the members it appointed hard enough and the wage settlement is revised down, it will provide the union with the novel opportunity of doing something about their wages and simultaneously of withdrawing their support for the board.

The case for a dynamic general secretary is made even more urgent by the fact that farmers have seen that the big money is to be made by going further down the food production chain into washing, wrapping, processing and packaging. The union, if it is to survive, must follow the farmers down the chain.

However, none of the leading candidates really pretend that the election will be won on the basis of policies. What matters is how many of the 31 district officers you know. These men are the ones who influence the 3,000 branch secretaries. No method exists of ensuring that a secretary does not put 'all' next to a candidate without actually calling a meeting. If only two or three branch members turn up their votes will be distributed proportionately and enlarged to make it appear as if the whole branch voted. Jack Boddy, district organiser for Norfolk, the union's heartland and the only serious candidate to come from outside head office will benefit from campaigning among the branches. He is surprisingly supported by Joan Maynard. Many thought that Arthur Leary, the most emphatic advocate of direct bargaining and a former official of the Vehicle Builders' Union would have won her favour. Leading with the branch nominations is Jim Watts, Bottini's favourite son and head of the Legal Department. He is probably the best known candidate, the biggest starter you can have in a union election, and will probably be the undoing of Ross Pierson, an articulate and urbane committee man. So centralised is the union that for most of the electorate, any candidate's achievements, beliefs, psychological eccentricities will be a closed book to them. When the winner is announced on 18 January, his first task will be to get the members excited once more by the possibilities of the union. Whatever Marx may have thought of the idiocy of rural life, socialism should spread a lot further than the suburbs.

6A MISERABLE AND LONELY DEATH?

A reconstruction of the inquest into the death of Steve Biko by Thames Television's

THIS WEEK

9.30pm tonight on Thames Television

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Tim Albert

Streaming Spires

This Christmas, as with Christmases before, a small number of young men and women will anxiously search their mail for confirmation that they will live the rest of their lives with a considerable advantage over their contemporaries. They will have been told whether they have been accepted as students at either Oxford or Cambridge. (The other side of the coin, of course, is that a small number who until now had been told that they were of exceptional ability, will be told that they are not; their understandable feelings of failure become a major problem this time of year, one sixth form tutor told me recently, calling for considerable reserves of tact and support).

Just how advantaged the successful ones will be is often played down. They will go to an institution which has the reputation at least of a centre of academic excellence (the fact that they generally reserve for themselves the task of defining just what constitutes that excellence is neither here nor there). Quite apart from the considerable amount of private funds lavished on the two places, each student will have an average of 9 per cent more money spent on them than on their former colleagues at other universities. And when they leave they will share a common background with eight out of ten top churchmen and judges, seven out of ten top civil servants, and roughly half of the vice-chancellors of the other universities.

Of course, there is a case to be made for institutions of excellence and for academic elites, but the case for them collapses if entry to them is not on academic merit alone. And accusations that this is not the case have surfaced recently in the pages of the *Times Educational Supplement*. They were sparked off by a letter from the headmaster of a medium sized comprehensive in rural Wales, who told the story of one of his pupils, the daughter of a small farmer. She had had an extraordinarily distinguished career in his school, doing virtually all that the examination system demands (nine A grades at O level, and four A grades at A level), but failing even to get an interview at Oxbridge.

This letter attracted several similar stories. 'My son was rejected in spite of having ten O levels (nine grade one) and four grade A's at A level,' wrote one mother. 'What better qualifications do they need?' One teacher told of two similar cases in his school, another said it had become a 'lottery' while a third wrote: 'What is more galling is the knowledge that inferior candidates (with A levels acting as the most objective standard that we have, are gaining places).'

There are two lines of explanation. The one favoured by Oxbridge supporters is that these candidates may have been good enough to impress the A level examiners, but that they weren't really Oxbridge material. The other explanation, which not surprisingly finds little favour among the dreaming spires, is that, in spite of their efforts to broaden (or dilute?) their intakes, the Oxbridge selecters tend to select the kind of people that they themselves once were – young middle-class southern males from independent schools.

The evidence supports the second explanation. While UCCA estimate that the proportion of pupils from maintained schools (i.e. comprehensives and non-direct grant grammar schools) getting into British universities generally is 51 per cent, the proportion getting into Oxbridge this autumn is lower at 44 per cent. More disturbing are the figures from the independent schools; not only is the proportion of applicants from this sector – at 28 per cent – considerably higher for Oxbridge than for British universities generally (13 per cent), but by the time the applicants have been transformed into entrants, the proportion has risen to an alarming 39 per cent. For British universities generally it is only 15 per cent.

Further evidence comes from Oxbridge examination results, which show over a period of time that those from the maintained schools certainly do no worse than those from independent schools; indeed, they do somewhat better. Hertford College, Oxford, which traditionally enjoyed a relatively lowly position in the university's academic league table, made conscious efforts a few years ago to broaden its base and take in more students from comprehensive schools. Three years later they shot up in the league.

Of course there is no evidence – nor any suggestion from me – that the bias is conscious. However an examination of the selection procedures operated by Oxbridge provides considerable evidence for the view

that those at independent schools enjoy considerable advantages. Each college is responsible for its own admissions, and this means that an extremely complex system has grown up, favouring those who know their way around, or who know many others who know their way around, or who are themselves known. (One letter to the *TES*, for example, quoted the head of a Cambridge college: 'Sometimes we take a gamble on a student from a school we haven't had anybody from before'.) The Welsh headmaster says that he has since been told that his candidate would probably have got an Oxbridge place if only he had been better informed on both route and destination. He accepts this.

On top of this is the continued reliance by Oxbridge colleges on their own examinations in addition to the A levels that all other institutions accept. It is an educational truism that performance in examinations reflects the tuition available; with their considerable advantages in resources and, particularly, intakes, the independent schools can afford to concentrate on these examinations. That they do was admitted by Dr John Rae of Westminster School, writing in his column in the *TES*, and admitting that his school tended to push candidates through their O and A levels at an early age, not worrying unduly about mediocre grades, and then concentrating on the final burst which would take them to Oxbridge.

The abolition of these examinations would be a sensible step – after all, what are A levels for? If the colleges want to select their own intakes – and that does seem a reasonable position – there is no reason why they shouldn't be able to do so on the basis of a universally accepted examination and on the evidence of their own interviews. Another overdue reform is the abolition of the closed scholarship, which gives a virtual guarantee of 62 places to independent schools (compared with only eight for comprehensives). In this time of state support, they are not only an anachronism, but a reminder that money can still buy privileges.

My own view is that these two reforms would certainly clear the air, but others are less optimistic. They argue that the old boy network would still exist, and that the independent schools would still manage to maintain their favoured positions. They suggest introducing more closed scholarships to redress the balance in favour of the comprehensives, or even that candidates should be selected on a quota basis. The Bakke case in America shows the pitfalls of this approach.

Still others have called for a public inquiry – a real symptom of despair and desperation. It might not, however, turn out to be that bad an idea, particularly if it grasps the real educational nettle and declares that the best way of ensuring that excellence is kept well apart from privilege would be to abolish the independent sector. And then, when the question of who gets to higher education is settled, perhaps we can begin to turn our attention to the much more neglected issues of how it should be organised, and of what it should consist.

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London Diary

☐ What a splendid idea it is that noisy children should be classified as 'hyperactive' and heavily sedated in the classroom, a state of affairs denounced this week by Dr Steven Box of Kent University. This excellent scheme not only saves the ratepayers money – the new Conservative GLC has apparently been combing the Soho sex shops for canes – but it could be usefully extended to so many fields. For instance 'hyperactive' dramatic critics could be given their fix and sit somnolent throughout the most frightful British musical with their critical facilities nicely dulled. I would also like to see a morning pill given to judges, cabinet ministers, tax inspectors and all those whose behaviour can be frequently described as 'disruptive, a bloody nuisance or naughty', which is how Dr Box defines that rare disease in children which causes the medical man to reach for his amphetamines. Life lags sadly behind fiction, and it seems that only now have educationalists got round to reading Mr Anthony Burgess's trail-blazing *Clockwork Orange*.

☐ Meanwhile that fine writer Mr Burgess has been discussing in the *Daily Mail* another of the forecasts of his book, the punk scene, which he regards with a good deal of dismay. It is no doubt distressing to the middle-aged prog., like myself, to find young people running about with swastika arm bands and safety pins through their cheeks, and present trends in 'the scene' make the Rolling Stones seem as cuddly as Cliff Richard; but it's as well that we look the future firmly in the face. A Mr Graham Hope, on the short list of Conservative candidates for the local elections at Ealing North has, of course, green and white hair, ripped trousers and an earring made of safety pins. Mr Hope's message to the electorate is: 'To me being a punk is all about individualism – and that's what the Tories stand for.' Although the Tory agent announced that the appeal of this candidate 'may be somewhat limited' I think that the Potential-Prime-Minister-Person would be unwise to neglect the huge punk vote. In fact, she and they stand for the future of England, which is one of the reasons why I plan to spend even more time in the country, planting vegetables and minding my own business.

☐ So Lord Shawcross has been sounding off to the Old Bailey journalists about those who defend in criminal cases. The ex-Labour Attorney, who came to be known as the 'Docker's QC' (Sir Bernard and Lady D., nothing to do with those who actually move heavy articles from the hold) says that 'we know with certainty that 80 per cent of those committed for trial are guilty' and that their defenders should not take advantage of the now severely limited jury challenges and that many accused people get off, not because the prosecution fails to prove its case and they are therefore innocent (Lord Shawcross seems to have forgotten what finer minded lawyers have called the 'Golden thread that runs through British Justice,' the presumption of innocence) but because they get legal aid and their advocates thus have a chance of 'confusing the jury'. So a contempt for the commonsense of a British jury is combined with a denial of a prisoner's age-old right to challenge even three of its members. To some of us the right of even the poorest sinner to have his case put in the best possible way seems a matter for pride in our system rather than regret; and legal aid has taken the sting out of the old sneer that British Justice is open to everyone, like the Ritz Hotel. Had Lord Shawcross practised at the Bar since 1958, when he left the whole sordid business to become a director of Shell, he might have known that over 81 per cent of those committed for trial are, in fact, convicted. It is also worth remarking that the only real hero to have emerged from this week's news is Mr Sydney Kentridge, a brave barrister fearlessly putting the case for a dead prisoner whom 80 per cent of South African whites probably think of as guilty without even the tiresome necessity of a trial. But perhaps from the moral heights of a place on the board of a City company even Mr Kentridge seems just another old twister like the rest of us.

☐ Last week I felt that Mr Norman St John-Stevas's views on the arts almost reconciled me to a period of Tory rule, the present Minister for the Arts having decided to retire from view and apparently snooze away this time of crisis. Now the Tory controlled GLC has undone all Mr Stevas's pious hopes and proved themselves, if not punk candidates, at least punk philosophers. The Young Vic is a theatre that attracts a young audience of enthusiastic theatre-goers who might never go to see Shakespeare and Molière in more expensive houses with softer seats. Now the GLC is planning to raise the Young Vic's rent by 500 per cent, and this is a decision taken by a certain Geoffrey Aplin as a chairman without reference to his committee. Judge Campbell, in a case concerning cinema licenses, has already stigmatised this form of decision making as unjudicial, undemocratic and therefore null and void. The GLC must, at once, get the safety pins out of its ears and, by way of penance, present the Young Vic with free cushions so we can all go there.

☐ As I peer uneasily into my murky crystal ball for 1978 I see not only the looming figures of Sid Vicious and Matron Margaret but the shadowy army of Puritans on the march. I am actually not at all fond of the now wide selling porn magazines, and although I wouldn't ban them I claim the privilege of not having to look at them; indeed when forced to do so in the way of business I invariably take off my glasses, reducing all the crutch shots to a pleasing impressionist blur. However, it is a sign of the times that the editor of *Hustler*, which sells 1.9 million copies in America, has been recruited for Christ by President Carter's sister. There have been some changes made in the regular features and 'Asshole of the Month' will become 'Turkey of the Month' and that well known character 'Chester the Molester' [illegible] 'Chester the Protector,' officer in charge of guarding virginity.

☐ Speaking of molesters, and being determined not to comment on a case which is *sub judice*, it is remarkable that at every party and dinner table both male and female voices are raised in hilarious contempt at the idea of any man objecting to sexual assault from a woman, whilst to suggest that any woman enjoys rape is to risk, at the very least, a black eye from the feminists of Henley-on-Thames. Sexual equality won't really be with us until both Balliol College *and* the crime of rape are open to both sexes, ex-wives have to pay a third of their income in alimony and lovers can eject their hyperactive mistresses from their flats in Hackney.

☐ Male, female chauvinist story of the week. A distinguished actress friend, sensitive in the performance of the great classical roles, ran into a wallpaper shop with her coat flying open and her sweater revealing a small bust measurement. Three builders, sitting on a wall, called out derisively. 'Not much up there, darling' and 'Make a good ironing board!' The furious actress was determined to get her revenge and, having bought her wallpaper, stormed out of the shop and denounced three men sitting on the wall. 'I'm sure you three men,' she stormed, 'have very small cocks but I don't make such a noise about it.' She then looked more closely and found she was addressing three astonished and quite different men. Their male vanity may never recover.

John Mortimer

This England

Prizes: £3 book token for first entry, £2 tokens for others printed. Paste entries on a postcard.

☐ Turning to the institution's public image Mr Knowles said about four years ago a Law Society study of the professions revealed that the public had the least regard for estate agents, putting them even below Members of Parliament. – *Brighton Argus* (M. Shaw)

☐ Instead of arriving by staff car, or even helicopter, his favourite manner of inspecting a unit was to drop by parachute, arm at the salute, as he touched down. However, this nearly ended in disaster recently when Bigeard, nearing 60, was inadvertently dropped into a shark infested sea while visiting troops in Madagascar. – *Daily Telegraph* (E. G. Breeze)

☐ More than 700 old age pensioners in a Hertfordshire psychiatric hospital will not be getting their £10 Christmas pension bonus because their doctors say they will waste it on extra chocolates, sweets and cans of drink. – *Daily Telegraph* (O. Hull)

☐ Some of the firemen on the telly were very badly spoken, so I suggest they get to their local libraries and get a decent book on how to speak correctly. – Letter in *Mid-Sussex Times* (Basil Mager)

☐ The most fundamental deprivations faced by the poor in inner-city areas are housing and money, particularly money, a consultants' report to the Government says. – *The Times* (Sheila Smith)

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University Forum

Sheila Hayman*

The Box in the Corner

Last September we all heard with a violent shock of *déjà-entendu* that violence on television is apt to lead to violent behaviour in small children, whose violent habits thus contracted may induce them to become violent adults later on. I am not at all denying the disturbing significance of this allegation, to which indeed many worrying parallels are easily found; excessively frequent soap-powder advertisements undoubtedly lead to obsessional cleanliness among certain housewives, the bleaching of coloured garments to an impeccable whiteness and the playground persecution of ten-year-old boys in unsuitably angelic dress. One might, indeed, essay the adventurous hypothesis that *Come Dancing* on television could be directly responsible for sprained ankles, permanently dazzled vision and the waste of an incredible number of sequin-sewing hours by overly-supportive mothers. The question I have been pondering is, what do horror documentaries lead to?

Over the last ten years or so, the documentary programme on television has become as familiar a part of the viewing week as Bert Foord with the Weather, and in many cases about as memorable (Sorry, Bert). Every Monday at eight, or whenever, we have to decide whether to indulge our low tastes in the offerings of the other channels, or slake our social consciences with an hour of the Facts, as though by the mere act of making this choice we achieved some practical result. What is actually achieved is another hour passed in front of the telly, perhaps a few hours of occasional musing in a new area, and a permanent deadening of sensibility to a problem which, once 'exposed', tends to become institutionalised; somebody else is coping with it, probably some charity; certainly not us. If the presentation of the report is effective, we are left metaphorically bashing on the fading screen at the end, properly rattled by true professionals and quite unequipped to to fight back. So John Pilger continues to menace us to the acclaim of an attentive press, photogenic and gut-punching in a sharp suit and a snarl. So, also, the distinction between 'drama' and 'documentary' is gradually eroded, as television companies add piquancy to their thrills by telling us they are TRUE. The film-makers themselves collaborate in this elision, finding that for some reason, an official body under investigation becomes far more co-operative if it is told that only 'background research' is needed for a 'dramatised documentary'.

The two documentaries that have remained most vividly in my memory are one made by Dimbleby and crew about the Ethiopian famine, and one I saw this summer in the course of a two-months' visit to Hong Kong. The former was very horrifying, collected a vast sum of money very quickly from the public and, as far as I know, failed to report on what subsequently happened to the money or the famine, let alone the fact that the Ethiopian government refused to allow any foreign aid supplies to leave Addis Abbaba anyway until its own lorries were ready some months later. Well, it would have looked bad for both of them, you see. The second film was very simply made by three people, all working for RTHK (the Hong Kong government's broadcasting organ), all unlike many RTHK staff, Chinese, and all participating jointly in the various processes of production. The film was about the distresses of old people in Hong Kong, who are increasingly shrugged off by their adult children and little helped by the government; it juxtaposed film of them in their rooms, selling oranges etc., with statistics about their numbers and the scale of the provision made for them by the government and other agencies. It wasn't particularly sensational, though the facts themselves were more alarming than I had imagined, and it deliberately avoided sensationalist camera-work and cutting; but what made it memorable was that it had been made in streets as familiar to the audience as to the makers, that the voices were those of the old people themselves, not mediated by some gravel-voiced reporter's voice-over, and that names and addresses of officials and relief organisations were given in the film. Thus at the end I felt that I could do something myself, and every day after that as I walked through Hong Kong I was reminded of the film by the people and places around me.

People in fact do leap at the handles occasionally offered them by documentaries, whether to help themselves to give up smoking, or to help other people, and many cross telephonists have headaches suffered after phone-ins to prove it; but people are also more likely to follow up such spontaneous enthusiasms if the opportunities present themselves near at hand.

It's very well for the BBC and the independent companies to feel impelled by 'responsibility to the public' and the prodding of a few lefty producers, to totter feebly every few months to the cliff-edge of life in the raw; but when they look over and see the nasty old abyss seething away down there, that same 'responsibility' mysteriously draws them back, and the sensibilities of audiences are once again saved from angst, anger and anarchist jokes. It is a commonplace already amongst thrusting, committed freelance directors that the forces of reaction on the sixth floor of Bush House are always going to spoil their fun, and their commitment to Truth will be lost on signing their contract.

But the only official opportunity they will have to talk about the film is at most, a neat semi-circular discussion by dreary TV pundits and spokespeople, transformed by the redeeming offices of the make-up department into flawless semi-animate dolls, carefully schooled not to interrupt each other and to keep their annoying nervous habits out of the baleful view of the camera. How boring this quickly becomes was betrayed in a documentary about a miners' strike once, in which such a discussion was intercut with a vociferous group at the pit-head, by no means flawlessly fluent but pushed beyond awe by sheer fury as they angrily put their case. Well, for entertainment value there was no question as to who won, and indeed it was rather difficult to see what the pundits were doing there at all, since they had undoubtedly said it all to the quality dailies already.

I suppose that it matters that we should know of the dangers of fast-breeder reactors, though I'm not sure how far it can affect most people's daily lives. However much we are told about our democratic right to correspond with our MP, the facts are that we have probably never met him, and he probably empties his waste-paper basket three times a day. But what television might be doing is to be insidious about smaller, more local issues, in which not so many public toes would be in danger of squashing. It is true that from their lofty monopolistic eminence, the BBC and other companies occasionally lean down to offer a camera and half-an-hour's non-prime time to amateurs, as for instance in *Open Door*, on condition that they don't expect any help from people who actually know about making good telly. The results, of course, are not generally very thrilling, which gives the producers a perfect excuse to shout 'Told you so', and get on with what they were doing before. But what can actually make such a programme interesting is the combination of the skills of a producer, the imagination of a good journalist, and the voices of real people. If it is low middle-class voyeurism that lures people in crowds to read about a day in a bun factory or a night in a maternity ward, it is a voyeurism shared by many. What is more, and even more shocking, is that voices don't have to be fluent or clearly audible, or even attached to nice-looking people with hairstyles, to remain attractive.

This, then is what documentary television can usefully do, and what radio has been trying to do for some time. If the nervous stranglehold of the BBC and the IBA can be loosened by cable and local transmissions, then, instead of scaring us pale over something whose circumstances are probably too complex to be helped by a glib demand for change, wouldn't it be better for television to use its powers to illuminate matters which are likely to be of continuing concern to us locally: if necessary, to make tediously mundane suggestions, to invite the viewer to answer back and even, possibly, occasionally, join in and speak for himself? It may seem banal and cowardly to run away deliberately from massive national concerns, but it is this, I believe, rather than ever more sensational 'exposures', that is needed to make us realise that the significance and power of documentary programmes do not begin and end between two police dramas on a rainy Monday night.

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First Person

Arthur Marshall

Without Tears

For examples of lethargy, idleness and general hopelessness one can hardly beat the British. London must be the only city in the world where wartime bomb damage is still plainly visible. I am referring to what is left of the façade of the Shaftesbury Theatre in Shaftesbury Avenue, the real one I mean (the theatre that now calls itself by this name should properly be The Princes). The ruins of the old Shaftesbury seem now to be partly a fire station and partly a car park. I understood that there was an agreement that all our theatres were to be preserved and their number in no way diminished. Why then has nothing been done in the way of rebuilding this charming house? It made a delightful home for the plays of Frederick Lonsdale and others.

When wandering in nostalgic mood through London's theatreland, I sometimes long for a magic wand with which to restore past glories to each theatre as I go by it. My somewhat old-fashioned tastes are at once revealed. At the London Pavilion, which has no right to be a cinema, there would be a Cochran revue by Noël Coward. At Her Majesty's, an enchanting musical called *Music in the Air* (Jerome Kern, and the best composer of them all). At the Criterion, Marie Tempest in no matter what. And at the Globe there would be *While the Sun Shines,* at the Phoenix, *The Browning Version*, at the Duchess, *The Deep Blue Sea,* at the Lyric, *Love in Idleness* – all of them plays, I need hardly tell you, by Terence Rattigan.

I first met him in 1938 at a birthday party of Ivor Novello's in that famous Aldwych flat perched high up above the Strand Theatre. Guests ascended to it in a lift about as capacious as a twin-berthed coffin and in which, in sardine-tin intimacy, one always found oneself pressed up against and nose to nose with somebody surprising like Gladys Cooper or Tallulah Bankhead. It would have seemed both priggish and unchummy to have gone rattling up back to back. You may well wonder what I, a humble public schoolmaster (£250 a year, with free laundry and the run of my teeth), was doing there, so theatrically and socially out of my depth. A brisk explanation. I had recently made, for Columbia, some allegedly funny gramophone records which had, remarkably, found particular favour with the acting profession, Ivor especially, and I was there to spout them out to his assembled friends after supper.

I was, naturally, inarticulate with nerves but Terry Rattigan, his charm and good manners instantly apparent, was a great support ('I'll laugh, anyway'). *French Without Tears* was in the middle of its triumphant run but he was entirely modest and did not look in any way like a successful playwright. But then, what ought a playwright, successful or not, to look like? A timorous householder, opening his front door to an Identikit amalgam of the salient features of Barrie, Shaw, Ibsen, Galsworthy and Pinero, might at once have taken fright and put up the chain ('Not today, thank you'). Terry, as slim and as neat and as what fashion writers will call 'well groomed' as he was to remain for most of his life, might have been somebody from Lloyd's perhaps, or from an ancient and highly respected City firm of wineshippers. He had been an opening bat for the Harrow First XI and the aura of cricket never quite left him. We were of an age and, though he had by then met the world, he was still as stage-struck as I and together we goggled at the splendid creatures before us – Zena Dare, Beatrice Lillie, Dorothy Dickson, Leslie Henson and almost every other star then in London. There was also an up-and-coming couple, who had just fallen desperately in love with each other, and their names were Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh. My ordeal, when it came, was far less alarming than might be imagined. Theatre people are very kind and make the best audience in the world.

Somerset Maugham, himself too a happy recipient of overnight dramatic success, had a word to say about its effect on the author of *French Without Tears.* 'He'll make a great deal of m-m-money, and in two years time he won't have a p-p-penny of it left.' This was partly true, mainly because of Terry's generosity. He was, in every sense, a giver, and the subsequent dazzling stream of Rattigan successes enabled him increasingly to give more. He had a passion for owning houses and for filling them with his friends. There have been houses in Sonning and Sunningdale, in Ischia and Bermuda, in Wentworth, Brighton, Eaton Square and Bonnie Scotland, and with the houses there sometimes went rather strange servants whose domestic oddities often pleased their master. At lunch, a distinguished actress, as it might be Diana Wynyard, or possibly Margaret Leighton, spoon poised above the vegetable dish that was being handed to her by a friendly but rum butler and trying to decide just how many of the courgettes to scoop out on to her plate, would find her meditations interrupted by an urgent hiss ("urry up, dear, I haven't got all day'). Or, even more agitating, a cascade of brussels sprouts would come flying over her shoulder in the general direction of her plate, followed by a large dollop of unwanted mashed potato ('Munch it up, dear, you're all skin and bone'). Terry would never have dreamt of trying to 'correct' such unconventional behaviour. He would have considered it impertinent. Human beings were what they were and you must take them as you find them, merely noting down their idiosyncracies for possible future use. Human beings fascinated him and he was extremely gregarious. In every respect but one, he really preferred, I think, the company of women. And in that one respect, he was never a victim of the promiscuous urges that afflict so many wonky gentlemen. His loves were for life.

And how tremendously he liked to laugh. The occasions were frequent. On a Berkshire golf-course an unliterary colonel approached him knowingly with 'I say, aren't you that writer chappie? *French Without Leave,* eh? Where on earth do you writer chappies get your ideas from?' Then there was a female medium who insisted on coming to visit him in his Sonning house and who, once inside the door, fainted dead away with a loud shriek ('Mr Rattigan, you've got something very nasty in your hall'). There was the time when, signing a foreign hotel register somewhat indistinctly, and possibly a little tipsily, he later appeared in the *Continental Daily Mail* as 'Recently arrived at the Hotel Crillon: Mrs T. Rothburn'. There was the evening when, living at that time in Albany, he had invited a famous mimic friend to dine who, on leaving at midnight, had loudly 'done' Edith Evans, another resident, the sounds reaching the ears of the then secretary and considerably agitating him ('Excuse me, Mr Rattigan, but does Miss Evans *drink*?'). And he never ceased to enjoy the memory of a manacled female Houdini, 'the under-water escapologist' once seen at a fair and whose barker's phrase he himself always used when about to enter a swimming-pool ('Ladies and Gentlemen, Madame Aqua will now lower herself into the tank').

Last Friday's BBC TV 'tribute' to him was made, I understand, about a year ago and with his full cooperation. He can hardly have known that it would be used as an obituary. Most of the other obituary notices that have appeared about him seem to me to have been less than generous. Grudging, they were. They certainly covered the ground but with little hint that here was a quite exceptional talent and a warm humanity, no suggestion that the plays were masterpieces of dramatic construction. Few writers thought to mention the enormous pleasure they have brought, and still bring. I do see that, to those also involved in the theatre, the huge success was hard to bear. His aims were simple and remained the same – to please. He wrote in these very pages about Aunt Edna, the mythical middle-brow theatre-goer (she had recently been to see the rather unacceptable *Waiting for Godot* and was airing her views). Aunt Edna is still, with her male counterpart, the backbone of the British theatre public (well, just look about you next time you go). The progressive theatre of ideas was not for her. She did not care for 'messages'. Other dramatists have managed quite well without them. *Hamlet* is quite an effective piece, but the only possible message to be extracted from it is that it doesn't always pay to take an after-lunch nap in an orchard.

The autobiography which he never wrote was to have been called *Without Tears,* a suitable summing-up of a happy life but inapplicable to the many friends and admirers who now mourn him.

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Letters to the Editor

The Bakke Case

Sir, Ben Whitaker on 'Reverse Injustice' (NS 2 December) gets in the end to very nearly the correct conclusion. The policy of 'reverse discrimination' is, he argues, an 'objectionable strategy'; and should be tolerated only as a 'temporary expedient, if at all'.

That it is an 'objectionable strategy' I gladly agree. Yet Ben Whitaker seems never to do more than skirt around the fundamental ground of objection. Thus it is, he says, 'repugnant to a number of libertarians of all races who distrust the reintroduction of racial criteria from however well-meaning motive.' But the objection here is not from libertarians as such – though that is a name which I am myself proud to claim. Nor is it a matter of a mere uneasy mistrust. The prime objection is that 'reverse discrimination' is just as racist as forward discrimination; and that it is as such immoral and not to be tolerated at all, however temporarily.

Racism precisely is advantaging or disadvantaging individuals on the basis of the particular racial group to which they happen to belong. And 'reverse discrimination' of course means admitting and appointing people to positions and privileges to which they would not otherwise attain, simply because they happen to be members of a previously disfavoured but now preferred racial group. So Ronald Dworkin and all the other professing progressives now thinking up specious reasons for promoting 'reverse discrimination' really are, what many of them are perhaps over-eager to accuse others of being, advocates of racism.

For me the fact that it is so clearly and flagrantly racist constitutes by itself a sufficient condemnation. But there are two further strong objections, of neither of which Ben Whitaker seems to have taken sufficient account. First, 'reverse discrimination', like forward discrimination, is bound by selecting some of the less well qualified but racially more favoured, to push down the standards wherever it is enforced. Second, both policies are sure to provoke all sorts of racially oriented attitudes and animosities around and about those who are felt or feel themselves to be advantaged and disadvantaged thereby.

ANTONY FLEW

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Whiteknights
Reading

Sir, Should disadvantaged people be given special help to make up for past inequalities, or should they be encouraged to achieve integration by struggling on equal terms with the rest of the population? This is the question at the core of the Bakke case, and I think it was not squarely confronted by Ben Whitaker.

Many of those backing the cause of Bakke – and the forces include prominent Jewish organisations, Ukranians, Poles, Italians – are deeply committed to the cause of racial equality but, like Mr Whitaker, they want ethnic minorities to be judged on equal terms with everyone else. They want race to become irrelevant. Nat Hentoff, in a recent edition of *Village Voice*, quotes a black lawyer, a fierce opponent of Bakke:

> How can you banish race as a factor in American life? The August figures show 14.5 per cent black unemployment. That's well over twice the whole unemployment rate. And 40.4 per cent of black teenagers are out of work, by contrast with 14.7 per cent of white teenagers. How can you take race out of these figures? How can you banish race when the fact that only about 2 per cent of medical doctors in this country are black?

The shameful under-representation of blacks in the professions, both here and in the States, is a reflection not just of racial discrimination, but of racial disadvantage – the tragic cycle that is set in motion by discrimination, and perpetuates it. Positive discrimination aims to end this cycle – to eliminate present inequalities that are a result of past discrimination. But there is more to it than that. The very skills and qualifications now regarded as sacrosanct by our colleges and universities are themselves culturally biased, devised by whites, suited to whites. And as long as they continue to be the standards by which people become successful, whites will continue to be in control, and minorities at a disadvantage. Special admissions programmes aim not just to allow ethnic minorities to enter fields where they have not previously been represented. They attack the roots of the problem – the assumptions that feed the institutionalised racism that runs through British and American society.

Mr Whitaker argues that the outcome of the Bakke case will eventually affect race relations in this country, and points out that the present Race Relations Act permits a limited amount of reverse discrimination. To a small extent this is true, but I think there is a more substantial way in which the Bakke case will make itself felt in Britain.

It has taken years to realise the extent of disadvantage which results from racism. This realisation is the impetus behind the progressive forces in this country who are encouraging the efforts of self-help groups, of black housing, education and employment projects, and who are urging that programmes be designed to combat the evils of urban deprivation and its heartbreaking consequences. These efforts will be blighted, and their principles discredited, if Bakke is victorious.

SALLY FELDMAN

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Hungary in 1956

Sir, I feel that the article in your issue of 4 November, 'Crying for Hungary', by Alison Macleod, calls for some comment. How straightforward she makes events in Hungary in November 1956 sound. The wicked Soviets, with malice aforethought, made an unprovoked attack on 'the lawful and democratic Hungarian Government'; John Gollan, the general secretary of the British Communist Party at the time, was an open and shameless liar, who really was 'on our side' but lacked the guts to declare himself, while the Executive Committee of the party were simple dupes of a sinister, undemocratic Political Committee. Let us get the last bit right first: the Political Committee was a working committee which met, usually weekly, to deal with matters needing attention between meetings of the full EC, but of course answerable to the EC. Sinister? I don't think so.

Of course events in Hungary in 1956 were tragic, but what section of Hungarian society was responsible is usually obscured. Hungary has a long history of reaction and repression, and has certainly never been a democracy in our understanding of the word. When the workers of Hungary took power they overreacted and not unexpectedly there were for a time excesses of a new kind. Meanwhile, waiting in the wings for the right moment were the remnants of a powerful and uncompromisings group – the former dictatorial rulers of the country.

There can be no doubt that Prime Minister Nagy, sincere as he may have been, was to be used, if possible, as the stepping stone to a full-blooded return to capitalist dictatorship. Even before Soviet intervention a familiar pattern was evolving. Communist officials and ordinary members as well as the police were being attacked and murdered on the streets, and I remember seeing photos exultingly produced in Britain of uniformed policemen hanging from lamp-posts. How many more lessons do we need before we get it straight? Political violence comes, when it comes, from the extreme right. Remember Spain.

There is not the slightest doubt in my mind that Hungary in 1956 was in imminent danger of the kind of takeover that we recently witnessed in Chile. At the very moment that he was being murdered by the army, Salvador Allende had a book on British presses entitled *Chile's Road to Socialism*. Workers and progressives on that road marched straight into a crater. How many lives will be forfeited, how much suffering will be entailed before the road is reopened we have no means of knowing. Hungary, whatever we may think of 1956, is still on the road to socialism.

Trying to understand Soviet Russian reaction, I did my best to see events through their eyes. I got a picture of fear, fear that they would soon be confronted by a ruthless capitalist dictatorship once more right on their doorstep, with the inevitable accompaniment of American nuclear bases. Not a picture, from their point of view, to be viewed lightly. When it was proposed to establish Soviet missile bases in Cuba the US reacted swiftly. I guess the Soviet Union did the same over Hungary. Whether you think that they were right in their evaluation of the situation is, in the end, the basic point at issue.

ARTHUR NOBES

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Le style C'est l'homme

Sir, The words that first sprang to my lips on seeing Mr Larry Adler's name (Letters 2 December) at the bottom of yet another of his fretfully facetious and apparently ubiquitously publicised plaints against *Private Eye* were identical to those lately revealed as Lermontov's last: 'At *that* fool, I'll not shoot'. But Professor Richard Cobb's writings have in the past provided me with so much pleasure and instruction that I feel out of gratitude bound to come to his defence. Mr Alistair Horne's account of the long drawn out years of France-Algerian *événements*, as the French insisted on euphemistically calling the Muslim population's fight for independence, is a considerable feat of scholarship but the following not untypical extract from it certainly read very like Luce-talk or *Time*-speak to me:

> The country was seized by a bad bout of *la grippe* a quarter of the population of Metz was reported stricken. In Paris the spring collections were beginning, amid much speculation about slipping waistlines and vanished sleeves. In New York General Douglas MacArthur was about to celebrate his 80th birthday in his retreat atop the Wardorf Towers, still fuming at his dismissal by Truman at the beginning of the decade. In England the Queen was about to give birth, Princess Margaret to get married, and Aneurin Bevan was dying, while fifty-six year old Dr Barbara Moore was halfway on her walk from John O'Groats to Land's End, accompanied by a mile-and-a-half line of cars.

As to Algerian *argot* and the difficulties experienced with it by Mr Adler, he obviously failed to note the glossary of some 50 words Mr Horne was kind enough to provide, together with a key to an equal number of abbreviations and acronyms. Mr Adler is a Flanner fan and there is certainly nothing

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wrong in that. Miss Flanner has taken an interest, albeit a very superficial one, in Parisian musical life and back in 1953 went out of her way to report back to Manhattan Jean Cocteau's Reunion of 'Les Six', one of whom, Darius Milhaud was one of several distinguished French musicians to compose music for execution by Mr Adler and his harmonica, while another, Arthur Honegger, used to do me the honour of sharing Yoga lessons with me in the Rue d'Anjou.

But the *New Yorker*, it is safe to say, is in Britain more usually to be found in Green Rooms than Common Rooms and Mr Horne's extracts from Janet Flanner's *Paris Journal 1944-65* (Gollancz 1966) were not always very relevant to his text. I was certainly surprised to find that, in Mr Horne's estimation, she had rated considerably more quotes than either of my old friends, Professor Raymond Aron and Mr Cy Sulzberger, both very much more serious contributors to the journalism of these troubled times. I suppose that if Professor Cobb had called the Casbah a 'no-go area' instead of 'impenetrable' his meaning might more swiftly have managed to penetrate the trendy old-timer's magpie mind. As for Georges Bidault and Guy Mollet, the first had become 'futile' and the second had been 'infamous' long before the first issue of *Private Eye* saw the light of day and its later numbers provoked the aged American virtuoso into one of his excessively prolonged engagements. Larry Adler may be the best and biggest mouth in the reed organ business but, *pace* Pascal, he is not a *Thinking* Reed Organist.

ALASTAIR FORBES

1837 Chateau D'Oex
Switzerland

Sir, Larry Adler flatters me when he suggests that my style owes something to *Private Eye*, a marvellously irreverent product of my old school, but, alas, at least 20 years after I had left it (or it had left me). *Métallo, insoumis* are French words that have nothing to do with any *pied-noir argot*. But I suppose no English reviewer ever makes sufficient allowance for the American ignorance of *any* European language. The *casbah* was impenetrableé *n'en d, plaise à* (sorry Mr Adler) *Répé-le-Moko* (an excellent film too). American reporting on Paris has nearly always been unremittingly whimsical, patronising and silly.

RICHARD COBB

Worcester College
Oxford

Good Question

Sir, With great respect to Mr Arthur Marshall (NS 25 November) the question to which the answer is 'Because he saw the salad dressing' is not 'Why did Sir Adrian Boult?' (it might have been 'Why did the lettuce bolt?') but 'Why did the lobster blush?'. Mr Marshall doubtless knows why the coal-scuttle scuttled (Because the dresser's drawers were open) and why the razor-bill raised her bill (To let the sea-urchin see her chin) as well as what made the barmaid sham pain (Because the stout porter bitter – 'porter' dates it).

ROBIN MCDOUALL

2 Formosa Street
London W9

Every Man is an Island

Sir, I refer to Ms Anne Bennett's article 'Kind Hearts' (NS 2 December). As a one-time physicist and lecturer, in later life I became disillusioned, adopting a mode that, no doubt, Ms Bennett would label as 'vagrant'. Like 'Henry', I have no wish to claim my rights; what right has one other than to be content within oneself? My life, as Henry's, is perfectly satisfactory; odd jobs and freedom to move on when and where I please. It is good people like 'Mr and Mrs Roberts' who gladden the soul.

Various welfare people have attempted persuading me to do this or that for 'my own good'. Is a man's life not his own? Having laboured innocently under the impression that social workers genuinely have the interests of their 'client' at heart, I am now puzzled; Ms Bennett appears to have little heart at all. Her cynicism and bitter-sweet scepticism, albeit amusing at times, makes one wonder if all social workers think as Ms Bennett, or is it merely a long-term 'perk' of her own disillusion? No doubt, when her time comes to 'claim her rights', Ms Bennett will be hot-foot along to the nearest DHSS officé . . .

A. J. S. PHILLIPS

Rural Oxfordshire

Kipling's Mrs Bathurst

Sir, Craig Raine, in his review of my book, *The Strange Ride of Rudyard Kipling* (NS 11 November), offers one of the most plausible of the many solutions that I have read of the obscurities in Kipling's 'Mrs Bathurst'. His shift of emphasis, however, to unreliable narrator does not alter my view that a story constructed around the loves and fates of two characters who are never given any fictive life should not be placed high in the canon of the author's work.

The whole intention of my book of 350 pages – of which 'Mrs Bathurst' occupies one – is to draw critics' and, more importantly, readers' admiration away from such literary crossword puzzle-making in which Kipling indulged in his later years, among much other very fine later work that I have discussed very fully, to the magnificent early and middle work once so admired and now so neglected.

If we are to accept Kipling as the crowned precise watchmaker that Mr Raine proposes in place of the king of exact imagination who wrote *Kim*, we must not be surprised if readers and critics with a love for life and feeling in fiction as opposed to intellectual dexterity condemn him to the guillotine.

ANGUS WILSON

180 South College Avenue
Newark, Delaware

Beerbohm's Hands

Sir, After reading Marc's review of *Beerbohm's Literary Caricatures* (NS 18 November), I looked again at my book, *Fifty Caricatures*, by Max Beerbohm, date 1913, to examine the hands, which Marc says Beerbohm was unable to draw. I really feel that Marc is quibbling. The drawing of all the hands in these witty, amusing caricatures is perfectly adequate. Some are stubby, some long and thin; all of them are expressive, but it is quite impossible to imagine any normal foot encased in those extraordinary boots and shoes.

M. R. NORTON

24 Dalkeith Street
Joppa
Edinburgh

House Memory Bank

Sir, I am currently undertaking research for a doctoral thesis on the NEW STATESMAN between 1913 and 1941. In this connection I would welcome any memories of the paper from readers or contributors of the inter-war period.

ADRIAN A. SMITH

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Canterbury, Kent

Delhi Testimonial

Sir, What's happening to the British press? It's dismaying to learn that some prominent newspapers want Mrs Gandhi to go unpunished for her misdeeds. Perhaps they think that like democracy, justice is also an avoidable luxury for non-whites! Anyway, it is good to see that NEW STATESMAN is not among them. NS coverage of India before, during and after the Emergency is outstanding, though one does feel that your interest in India has become erratic and you have become insular. Yet, we here are grateful for K. R. Sundar Rajan's articles. He writes incisively, boldly and brilliantly and is easily the best journalistic interpreter of India to the outside world.

Incidentally, according to a local magazine, the fine anonymous pieces on India which appeared in the NS during the emergency and which rattled Mrs Gandhi and her advisers were from K. R. Sundar Rajan. No wonder he was sent to prison! Such great journalists are among the best guarantees that India will remain a free nation.

K. B. DUTTA

Delhi University
Delhi

Punch Line

Sir, John Mortimer, by not listening carefully enough to *The Long Search*, omitted the important final statement in his retelling of the Jewish parable, a statement which makes the parable more profound and more complex than his truncated version. After the trial in which the Rabbis, by a majority of two to one, found God guilty, one of the two in the majority said: 'Come, let us pray to God.'

ANTHONY RUDOLF

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London N19

Disarming

Sir, I am working on a book on the British Disarmament Movement, a section of which is concerned with the subsequent activities of CND and Committee of 100 supporters. I would be very interested to hear from activists from the 1958/1965 period who would be willing to complete a questionnaire.

R. K. S. TAYLOR

Ellerslie
St Andrew's Avenue
Morley, Leeds

Sting in the Tail

Sir, I am worried. Garland's cartoon in last week's NEW STATESMAN quoted the first stanza of Mrs Norton's 'The Arab's Farewell to his Steed' with President Sadat as the Arab and Arab Unity as the steed. Has Mr Garland read the final stanza? If so, he will know that the Arab cancels the sale, flings them back their gold, leaps upon the back of the steed and departs to scour the distant plains.

P. B. EADE.

11 Cartmal Close
Reigate, Surrey

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BOOKS IN GENERAL

Clive James

Bigger Means Worse

The Rise and Fall of the British Manager
by ALISTAIR MANT *Macmillan* £5.95

Hampered by subject matter which does not grip, lumbered with a title which promises little, this book will probably not attract many formal reviews outside the business journals. Yet its informal influence is likely to be considerable. Perhaps the tired idea that Australian residents of Britain are blessed with an outsider's view (while being cursed, needless to say, with an outsider's understanding) has something to it after all. Alistair Mant is an Australian – among the most original, it is now apparent, of his generation – and he seems to have come up with an analysis of this country's present condition which nobody else has quite matched for depth and point. His view is not systematic or even particularly consistent, but it does get to the heart of the matter.

Doctor in the House, *Brothers in Law*, *Dentist in the Chair* – if Mant had called his slim volume *Managers on the Job* it might have at least been included in a few Christmas stockings. But although he commands, at his best, a seductive light style, he has not even elected to aim his work at the frivolo-solemn status enjoyed by such artfully sugared pills as *Parkinson's Law* and *The Peter Principle*. His book lurches between three stools: it is too serious for the entertainment market, too entertaining for the serious market, and not sufficiently concerned with working seriousness and entertainment into a successful blend. As a result, it might have trouble establishing an identity.

Yet Mant's principal ideas are already propagating themselves, as evinced, for example, by Bruce Page's recent survey (NS 14 October 1977) of the conditions which gave birth to Jim Slater's upward plunge. Page drew freely on Mant's notions, and in the future many another journalist is likely to do the same, not least because they offer the possibility of explaining British institutions without seeking access to inside knowledge. In fact an excess of inside knowledge, as opposed to clear public accountability, is seen as one of the reasons why those institutions get into such messes.

Mant's principal conclusion, which he convincingly argues ought to be a premise, is that in healthy economies there is no such concept as management. What ails the British economy, he claims, is not the quality of its management, but the fact that management exists at all. This central idea seems to me not only more right than wrong, but more liberating than inhibiting. You don't have to be a professional, or even an amateur, economist or sociologist, to guess that any opinions on British society which talk about reconciling 'the two sides of industry' simply damage the English language while leaving the problem untouched. The reason now becomes clear, or anyway clearer: it is because they are camped in the air. There was small cause for anyone to write, and even less cause for anyone to read, those endless articles about how new management might help British Leyland. The fact that it needs so much management is why British Leyland is helpless.

Insofar as industry is concerned with making things, says Mant, there ought only to be one side of it, in which everybody from top to bottom of the hierarchy is productive. The concept of two sides is a *social* concept – it is both a consequence and a cause of social disunity. To the extent that management occupies itself with mediating between the two sides, to that extent it is occupied with a social function, not an industrial one. Moreover, it is occupied with a social function that can't work. Management can be an industrial success only by eliminating itself. It can consolidate itself only as a social failure, whereupon industry must fail too. Management should mean nothing more or less than making things run. If it comes to mean anything else, they will soon cease running.

This is the kind of idea which, while seeming to dismiss a subject, actually opens it up. A comparably revealing brainwave was Jakov Lind's contention that there were no Nazis. Lind's discovery was abused when it was noticed at all, but he was, in fact, on the right lines. The most exhaustive studies of Nazi philosophy and organisation are unable to give a clear picture of why the Third Reich was as it was. It is more fruitful to assume that what happened under Nazism can and will happen under any political system, whenever means are justified by ends. Evil simply exists, and will express itself as soon as it is given the chance. Lind has not written a political philosophy. All he has done is crack a joke. But any political philosophy which could not take account of such a joke would be fundamentally inadequate - no matter how far it was elaborated, it would never arrive at the truth.

On less portentous ground, Mant's idea that there should be no management is almost equally fruitful. There is no use saying that he overstates his case, because he is less occupied with making a case than with drawing attention to the possibility that the contrary case, for all its mountains of stored data, might be meaningless. Mant is properly acerbic about Burnham, but there is nothing new in that; he is too quick to draw upon the wisdom of Ivan Illich, and there is something unsatisfactory about that; there are many places where his argument runs thin, and many more where his anti-jargon sounds like jargon in a new get-up. Nor do his diagrams always explain more than they conceal. But his arguments are powerful in the sense that they spread more clarity than confusion. It lights up a lot of darkness, for example, to suggest that the dream of a conflict-free industrial organisation will produce conflict *inevitably*. 'It was an agreeable, fantastic, "if only" sort of world-view, in which the unions were necessarily cast as obdurate, destructive and reactionary; and so, in time, they became.'

Mant conceived his management theories while working as a management theorist: by his own account, he was absorbing the relevant facts even while engaged in recommending irrelevant solutions. His reasons for being against bigness centre mainly on the fact that bigness leaves too much room for management to grow. The consequence is a doomed attempt at bringing the two sides together by the very element which is forcing them apart. The top and bottom of the hierarchy ought to be united by an interest in what they are making. (Mant's recurring real-life example is an overcoat firm in which owners and workers talk nothing but overcoats.) They can't possibly be united by social engineering.

The place of work is a bad place in which to try uniting the classes. But school is not necessarily a better one. Mant's notions become really subversive – constructively disruptive – when they are applied to education. The Left will hate them as much as the Right. His views on this topic might well have been expressed more scathingly, since he has spotted the mismanagement (i.e. the management) with great accuracy. Britain has desired for itself all the benefits of an industrial society without admitting the dirty-handed into the professional elite. Education has been reconstructed only for the purpose of social engineering – in other words, it has been managed, and with the usual results.

Britain will never abolish class divisions by setting out to abolish class divisions. That much ought to be axiomatic. Equality, like happiness, is a by-product of absorption: Britain desperately needs more of it, but is getting less and less, since it evaporates when pursued. The country is never more divided than when management talks of how its interests coincide with those of the workforce. It seldom occurs to management – but with the advent of Mant's book might now start occurring more often - that in industry there is no room for management, only for workforce.

Organisations set their own optimum limits for growth. When they step beyond those limits, management sets in, and they decline. If they are dragged beyond those limits, usually by government-organised mergers, acute management sets in irreversibly, often to the point where nothing except management is produced. It is, therefore, quite reasonable to blame management for things like the current shemozzle over the Polish order for ships. Any industry in which management can blame the workers is *ipso facto* a wreck.

But it would be pretentious to despair about Britain. (Certainly Mant does not: he is enjoying himself.) Britain's problems are those of a free country. One of the

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most acute is posed by the fact that the intelligentsia is a symptom pretending to be a diagnostician. It assumes, almost to a man, that there is a clear distinction between industry and creativity. In fact, industry is either creative or else it is a liability, whereas most people who fancy themselves creative are wasting their time. They would have been better off in industry, had they been trained for it, but as things are the ones who end up there are trained for little else besides management, which usually means that they don't know how to make anything – except, of course, mistakes.

James Cameron

Nobody Knows

The Japanese by EDWIN O. REISCHAUER *Harvard* £9.75
The Russians by HEDRICK SMITH *Sphere* £1.50

The Japanese are a sedate and obedient people who every so often go into hysteria, they make cars and transistors and arrange flowers, they are abundant and industrious, they have an Emperor who belongs to the oldest dynasty on earth, they swarm round the world in dense groups taking photographs of each other, they are by definition inscrutable, they like committing suicide and viewing the cherryblossom, they have incomprehensible politics and an interesting institution called *geisha*, and they have to be watched pretty sharply or they will put one over on you.

Oddly enough, the stereotype would seem to be not far off the mark, according to Professor Reischauer. And Professor Reischauer should know: Japan is his subject at Harvard, he was born and raised there and was US Ambassador to Tokyo in the Sixties; few people are as qualified to define this rather eerie land. His portrait of the country and its background, culture and values is the best of scores of such books I have read, and if it leaves the Japanese still a bit enigmatic, that is indeed what they are.

Most people, including the Japanese, think of Japan as a small country, which it is in comparison with its enormous Eurasian neighbours. It is less revealing, however, to say that Japan is smaller than California than to say that it is half as big again as Britain, with twice the population, and with a GNP streets ahead of anything in Europe. It has the highest density of both population and production per square mile of habitable land of anywhere in the world. Japan is the world's biggest importer of oil, coal, iron ore, cotton, almost everything you can think of. Today it even imports silk. Its absolute dependence on global trade for very survival determines almost every relationship it has.

So much for the hard facts, which Professor Reischauer presents much more gracefully than the above. They are extremely important to his analysis of the Japanese character, if indeed such an analysis be possible. The irony is that centuries of isolation have made the Japanese acutely aware of everything that comes from outside, and inclined to draw special attention to its provenance; they themselves have made the fact of cultural borrowing a major theme of their history.

> Thus they have given themselves and others the impression that they are somehow uniquely cultural borrowers. A myth has grown up that, unlike other peoples, the Japanese are mere mimics, incapable of invention themselves and unable to understand the inner essence of what they have borrowed. In actuality, their isolation has probably forced them to invent a greater part of their culture and develop a more distinctive set of characteristics than almost anyone. What distinguishes them is not their imitativeness but their distinctiveness and their skill at learning and adapting while not losing their own cultural identity.

Nevertheless there is the generalisation that the Japanese are intellectually not very creative. Everyone knows of their delicate artistic bent and their sensitivity to nature (which has not however prevented them despoiling their countryside and polluting their cities with the assiduity they apply to everything), but their achievements in ideas and philosophy seem to us meagre. Political thought and scholarship in the social sciences seem to be almost entirely synthesising of ideas derived from elsewhere.

Part of this, Professor Reischauer suggests, may be due to the language dilemma. It is in fact extraordinarily difficult for Japanese to learn English and, of course, vice versa. The English words they have absorbed into their vocabulary in such abundance become transmogrified: Hello, my name is . . . (*Haro, mai neimu izu . . .*). The Japanese have wild difficulties with l's and r's, which seem to be wholly interchangeable. In Tokyo I was always puzzled when, seeking the Press Club, one was obliged to ask for the 'Pless Crub'. If it can be said one way, why not the other? Nobody knows.

The Japanese went through the traumas of war, defeat and occupation with exactly the same social discipline as they had shown during the great shifts from feudalism and isolation to central government and international contacts a century before. But they do not have in their political heritage any experience of the concepts and practices of democracy. According to Professor Reischauer there never were inalienable rights, no concepts that might have underpinned a Magna Carta; feudal bonds were, and to some extent still are, seen as basically moral. There is a plus side to this: the Japanese political unity never had to be built up, as in most developing countries, after colonial subjugation. 'The 21st century', says Professor Reischauer,

> may not be 'the Japanese century', as some non-Japanese have grandiloquently proclaimed, but Japan may well be among the leaders – possibly even the pre-eminent leader – to finding solutions to the problems that mankind will face in the 21st century.

The Russians is a less scholarly but far more ample book. Hedrick Smith was the *New York Times* correspondent in Moscow for three years in the early Seventies, won a Pulitzer, and has now produced a tome of some 200,000 words on his researches. Perhaps 'researches' is not the right word; this is a personal account of his manner of life all over the Soviet Union, his encounters, responses, deductions. It is a 'journalist's book', as they say, and all the better for that when the journalist is as observant and intuitive as Mr Smith.

It is, to be sure, rather predictable. All accepted foreigners in Russia seem to go through the same process of isolation and segregation:

> Because of the obvious obstacles very few foreigners make a serious and sustained effort to get to know Russians, other than their few designated official contacts. A rather comfortable paternalism envelops the foreign community . . .

So they live in cosy aliens' ghettos, shop in alien hard-currency stores, travel by car rather than by bus: 'Life soon comes to resemble a long cruise on a luxury liner with the same old bridge partners every evening.'

Yet, as Mr Smith shows, it is not impossible for a curious, purposeful Russian-speaking foreigner to get at least some way under the skin. He travelled the Soviet Union 'as widely as time and the Soviet authorities would permit', thus coming to terms with the fact that it is a very big place. ('The United States plus half of Canada would fit into Siberia alone. Leningrad is much closer to New York than to Vladivostok.') He interviewed the dissidents Solzhenitsyn, Sakharov and Medvedev, the met head-on with all varieties of government officialdom and made scores of fruitful acquaintances. He became aware, inevitably, that the great egalitarian society is as hierarchical as any other country and more so than most, that Moscow is pre-eminently a city of privilege, that in the most various of circles there is a strange or rather creepy nostalgia for the days of Stalin ('At least then you knew where you were').

A curious element in this very perceptive book is the Russian response to Watergate. The Russians could never fathom it.

> Not the break-in, the eavesdropping and the cover-ups. That they understood well enough from a history of bloody intrigues and cabals under both Czars and communists. The baffling element was the scandal that followed. It took place in a political dimension beyond their ken . . . The notion of the purposeful division of political power and of the ruler's being subject to the restraints of law was something that met scepticism from even the most sophisticated Soviet analysts of American affairs . . .

When the US got a new President Mr Smith was given the sympathy of an Intourist guide, who automatically assumed that a new Administration in the White House would order the *New York Times* to

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recall him. It was always assumed that the *New York Times* was an organ of the US Government, as it is always assumed that the BBC is the creature of Whitehall.

These are two penetrating and beguiling studies of two societies which are totally dissimilar in personality, yet oddly alike in their responses. What one would like to see now is the scholarly professor and the chatty journalist collaborating on a study of, say, *The British*. But would anyone want to know?

Neal Ascherson

One Hair of the Head

Missing Persons and Other Essays by HEINRICH BÖLL *Secker & Warburg* £6.50

I saw Heinrich Böll only once, and in the nastiest circumstances. Alexander Solzhenitsyn, hurled out of Russia, had come to earth at Böll's cottage in the Eifel hills. Two or three hundred journalists surrounded the little house, banging on the door and ringing the bell and peering through the windows and pissing in the outbuildings. Böll, much more distressed than his Russian friend, swam up and down his transparent home like a goldfish. Sometimes the pressmen pretended to be Russian emigrés, or coached village girls to approach the door with flowers ('welcome to freedom, Uncle Solzhenitsyn'). Mostly, they stamped about the cobbled yard, to keep warm, and their shoes brought to light old cartridge-cases between the stones. A little group formed and peered. They were American point-five shells. Perhaps from a jeep in 1945; more probably, cast from the waist-guns of a bomber on its way to destroy Cologne.

This was a scene much calculated to reinforce poor Böll's view of his world. As he said in a lecture in 1968, here reprinted, 'if we do not follow the fad of displaying and recording our genitals, this is only because sentimentality, untransformed objectivisation, embarrasses us . . .' In the same talk, he proposed in his hopeful way that courtesy was a virtue 'inherent in our humanity'. But the Solzhenitsyn circus was nothing compared to the sort of pressure Heinrich Böll is under now, charged by the whole German Right with the 'crime' of being a 'sympathiser' – in other words, with having stood up not for the aims and methods of the Baader-Meinhof group but against the aims and methods of the legal and political backlash they have provoked. His political genitals have been nailed to the German notice-board: official courtesy seems confined to President Scheel, who has continued to treat the anti-Böll campaign with scorn.

The interest of these essays is that they antedate this crisis in the novelist's career. It is much easier to see Böll clearly: a tender, inward-turned, highly professional writer, a liberal Catholic of the Rhineland who detests war only less than people's amnesia about war, a sentimental man who does go overboard at times for unlikely idols like Bernadette Devlin or Solzhenitsyn himself.

Cologne is his place. To most visitors, and most Germans, it is today an unattractive, well-heeled, rather aggressive city. Heinrich Böll sees this, but also knows his own town in memory and history: the ancient streets obliterated by the bombing, and the silent, dusty world of rubble which came afterwards. Cologne is the smell of washtubs, the taste of bread in the postwar famine, the flowers pinched from the park to scent the flat where he spent wartime leaves. Cologne is his fortress against German idealism; as Danzig has been for Günter Grass, against official amnesia and abstract political generalisation. The most impressive – because the most functional – West German radio programme used to be the Red Cross appeal for missing children: pathetic descriptions of girls and boys lost in the chaos of 1945-6 and now either long dead or long grown-up into strangers. 'Missing Persons', the little essay, plays on this idea. Böll will not give up his search for the reality of the past. 'I want the one hair of the head that has fallen to the ground.'

Several of these pieces concern Ireland, a country fascinating to the novelist because he finds there the virtues of West Germany's vices. Memory: the Irish are not afraid to recall their famines and defeats, while the great German hunger and humiliation of 1945-7 has been wiped from public consciousness. Non-conforming Catholicity: can the Church in Germany find such figures as Brendan Behan, anti-clerical and republican from his ancestors, or Bernadette Devlin who joins a generation of young priests across the world in condemning the Church for its failure to recognise the nature of the industrial age? The price of sin: radical Catholics in Germany may applaud Behan for 'permissiveness', but are too smug and petty-bourgeois to grasp that sex in Ireland 'is a matter of passion, and there they know that human nature has fallen and will continue to fall'.

There is a great deal of literary criticism here, most of it concerned with the Russians: Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Solzhenitsyn. Criticism does not come easily to Böll. He often writes obscurely or tentatively, or rambles. He is at his happiest when in one essay he analyses the structure of *The First Circle* and talks as a craftsman, or when, in another, he answers a question about Dostoevsky by inventing lives for his characters in the modern Soviet Union.

Böll is not a man for epigrams, and he is awkward in the super-sophisticated (and now pretty outdated) form of the *feuilleton*, which can still be found in central European journalism. But in his Nobel Prize lecture, reprinted here, he comes close to defining his position: a classless literature – 'the discovery of whole regions of the humiliated, of those alleged to be human refuse' – which does not equate poetry with political agitation or make an idol of rationality.

This relationship between the humble and the humiliated is the most serious theme of Böll's work. In the same Nobel lecture, he said:

> We, who find it so easy to humiliate, lack something: humility, not to be confused with subordination . . . That is what we did with our colonised peoples: we turned their humility, the poetry of their humility, into their humiliation. We always want to subject and conquer: no wonder, in a civilisation in which our first foreign-language school-book is Julius Caesar's *Gallic Wars* . . .

A moment's recollection of Böll's novels, and especially of his recent novels about women – *Group Portrait with Lady* and *The Lost Honour of Katharina Blum* – brings that quotation to life. The system has ways of making simple, decent people feel filthy. But Böll is also talking here about exaggerated rationality, whether in the form of a Prussian civil service or a fanatical creed,

> a form of Western arrogance which, by way of colonialism and a sense of mission, or a blend of both, we have proceeded to export all over the world as an instrument of subjection.

He doesn't, it naturally follows, care for 'heroics'. In an essay about the battlefields of the Hürtgenwald, and in some other pieces here, he repeats his modest hope that one day there will be a war memorial bearing only the genuine last word of most soldiers – 'Scheisse!' Böll happened to be in Prague on 21 August 1968, and the only really unkind verdict passed in a long and deservedly famous account ('The Gun Was Aimed at Kafka') is hung on a German boy who theatrically refuses to give up his camera to a Russian soldier. A crowd gathers: a senseless death is averted by argument. Afterwards Böll and his wife sit down, and find their knees shaking. 'I had no use for the young man's "courage".'

This collection includes a prophecy, the launching of an accurate intuition. This is Böll's lecture on 'Georg Büchner's Relevance Today', which he delivered ten years ago, in 1967, as the student movement was reaching its climax. Heinrich Böll sensed at once that Büchner (poet, dramatist, revolutionary: died in exile at the age of 24: 'premature perfection; premature death') was reaching his hand out over more than a century to stir another young generation. And Böll's selection of quotations shows that he also sensed how much closer to Büchner – into the world of conspiracy, life-and-death struggle, violence, prison 'suicides' – some of that generation were to travel. 'Young people are criticised for the use of force. But are we not in a perpetual state of force?' Büchner asked. Böll is a man of peace, not force, but even after the Baader-Meinhof earthquake and the tidal wave of law-and-order which it raised, he still respects the motives of the modern Büchnerites where he can, and appeals to their enemies for reason and mercy. So, in the German way, they call him a *Nestbeschmutzer* – a fouler of his own national nest. In cold times, that may be the only way to keep warm.

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John Porteous

Baedeker Raid

Venice: The Rise to Empire by JOHN JULIUS NORWICH *Allen Lane* £7.50
Florence and the Medici: The Pattern of Control *by* J. R. HALE *Thames & Hudson* £7.25

At about the turn of the century J. M. Dent published a series of books in de luxe Everyman format called 'Medieval Towns'. They were mostly written by ladies of moderate scholarship who had read their Dante. They were designed for travellers, and they added anecdotal interest to the plain facts of Baedeker. John Julius Norwich is a successor to what the Victorian historian Thomas Hodgkin, in a note on the early history of Venice, called 'this useful class of writers'. He is a cultivated traveller who has felt impelled to share his interest in the places in Italy which he knows and loves; and he is agreeably modest about it. Perhaps therefore the only criticism of his attractively produced book is that it is presented as the first volume of a full and scholarly history of the Venetian republic. That it assuredly is not. Lord Norwich competently retells the set-pieces of Venetian history, the Fourth Crusade, the Bajamonte conspiracy, the execution of Marin Falier; but he never comes to grips with, and indeed seems unaware of, the fundamental historical problems.

For the early history of Venice, the Venetian sources are both too late and too biased to be reliable. If Venice played off the Byzantine and the Western empires one against the other, she did so only by accepting a degree of formal subservience to both which the historians who wrote in her independent heyday were to proud to acknowledge. Lord Norwich follows these historians in glossing over, as a mere *acte de présence*, Venice's representation at Roncaglia in 1154, when the Italian communes made their submission to Frederick Barbarossa on the way to his imperial coronation. Yet both then and much later, when Venice was contending with the aristocratic feuding and conspiracies of the 13th and 14th centuries, she was threatened with, and only just managed to avoid, the political fate of the mainland cities. Lord Norwich seems not to have contemplated this possibility. His view of the feuds is that the Republic should by then have outgrown them. A better historian would have explained why they were still going on.

Lord Norwich sees Venice in isolation and in the light of her later glory. He sometimes gives the impression that he is not too sure what is going on in the world outside the lagoon. For him, Louis the Great of Hungary is a 'shadowy figure', though Louis ruled most of Dalmatia and the central European hinterland which provided Venice with much of her gold and an important market for her goods. Elsewhere Louis is called 'a troublemaker'. Yet perhaps Venice made trouble for him sometimes. We shall never learn from this book.

For Lord Norwich Italian history is 'an ever-shifting kaleidoscope'. The contrast between his book and Professor Hale's is pointed by the latter's forbidding subtitle *The Pattern of Control*. Nobody should be put off by this: *Florence and the Medici* is an impressive demonstration of a real historian's control over the full range of his sources and his discernment of a significant pattern in the material on which he is working. Like all the best histories, Professor Hale's is allusive. For the central period of the book, the 15th and 16th centuries, he sets Florence easily into its Italian and, later, its European context. He gathers together and analyses all the elements in Florentine life, not only political but economic, social, philosophical and artistic, which contributed to the advance of the Medici to their commanding position in the city. This part of the book is very dense, since Professor Hale brings out the pattern by weaving these elements together very tightly. However, the texture is lightened by lively character studies of the leading members of the family. In illuminating asides Hale contrasts their position with that of the nobler families who established themselves as lords or tyrants in other Italian cities and with that of the mutually watchful patrician families of Venice.

The central turning point in *Florence and the Medici* occurs under the Medici popes Leo X and Clement VII, of whom the book gives us a sympathetic but penetrating study. If, in Professor Hale's words, 'they peered with little comprehension at the spiritual quickening in Germany and Switzerland', they dominated Florence as effectively from the Vatican as any previous member of the family had contrived to do from the Medici palace. The immense prestige of the papacy radiating from Rome more than filled the vacuum left by their departure from Florence. In spite of the three-year interlude of the Florentine republic, it was during this time that Medici rule became so indispensable, that when in due course Charles V's policy called for an authoritarian régime in Florence, he found it necessary practically to invent a Medici to fill the bill. The sovereignty finally achieved by Duke Cosimo I was incubated in the years of Leo and Clement.

The Medici symbol of the *broncone*, the stump cut back to flower again with renewed vigour, is a recurring theme of Professor Hale's book. No exponent of it is more remarkable than Cosimo I, who reigned 37 years and held his own among the great powers as Grand Duke of Tuscany. A man whose vision, whose reach and whose grasp were all in proportion, he was at once the most successful and the least attractive of the Medici. Hale, an expert on fortification, makes sinister play with Cosimo's building of the Belvedere fortress, designed not to defend but to cow his own city. If *Florence and the Medici* becomes slighter towards the end, that only suits the subject, since the story of the Medici closes in pathetic comedy. No book, in any case, will supersede Harold Acton's classic *The Last Medici*. Professor Hale's work, however, deserves to become in its turn the classic short study of the whole dynasty.

More Christmas suggestions

The Popular War Histories, published nearly 30 years ago and long since out of print, have been re-issued in paperback. Well-known authors give first-hand accounts of selected highlights of the greatest military conflict in recorded history. The titles are *Arms and the Men* (about the land war as a whole), *Five Ventures* (dealing with Iraq, Syria, Persia, Madagascar, and the Dodecanese), *the Campaign in Italy, North West Europe 1944-5, Greece and Crete 1941,* and *Norway — The Commandos — Dieppe*. All contain photographs and campaign maps. *The Campaign in Italy* costs £3, the others £2 each.

Exploring is a new series of illustrated booklets linked to a Science Museum exhibition about the latest ways in which Man is pushing back the frontiers of knowledge. The titles explain themselves: *Man on the Moon, The Solar System, Remote Sensing, Mind and Body, Our Changing Climate, Under the Sea*. All except *Mind and Body* have a centre section of colour plates. *Remote Sensing* costs 95p, the others 75p each.

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HMSO BOOKS

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Julian Symons

Hackette Job

Killing Time by SANDY FAWKES *Peter Owen* £4.95

On 7 November 1974 Sandy Fawkes, a 'top reporter' in Fleet Street, flew into Atlanta, Georgia, on a 'super-jaunt' provided by an American weekly which was her temporary employer. What would be the natural course of action for a top reporter footloose in Atlanta? Look for a man, of course, particularly as the sight of the motel's king-size bed has made her randy. What does the bar have to offer? At first glance not much, but then she seems to have picked a prize from 'the bran tub of life'. A six-footer, broad-shouldered, narrow hipped, very handsome, strong jawline, firm dimpled chin, marvellous dancer, owner of sleek white new car – wonderful, but can he make it? 'A knowledgeable glance at his slender loins on the dance floor', makes her doubtful, but still they do get to bed. No luck.

The man was a mass killer named John Paul Knowles (though he used another name while with her). His total number of victims is uncertain, but probably there were more than 20. He had killed a homosexual businessman a couple of days before he met Sandy Fawkes, together with the man's daughter, whom he had strangled and tried to rape. Most of the gear he had with him belonged to one or another of his victims. The owner of the white car had been an executive of the Ohio Power Company, and it was his credit-cards that Knowles used when he stayed with Sandy Fawkes at hotels. As soon as he left her after the six days they spent together he held up at gunpoint a woman they had met, and attempted to rape her. Why did Sandy Fawkes survive? Presumably because her easy acceptance of sexual achievement or failure imposed no emotional strain on him. He had told her that he was going to be killed soon for something he had done in the past, and had said also that the story was on tapes he had deposited with his lawyer. The tapes have not been made public, but they existed, and a federal grand jury listened to them for five-and-a-half hours. They presumably gave details of Knowles's criminal activities. He was shot by a tough Georgia Bureau of Identification agent while trying to escape, five weeks after his arrest.

If you had spent a week with a mass murderer in such circumstances, what would you do? Try to forget it, would seem a decent answer, but that is not Sandy Fawkes's way. 'Working on a newspaper had taught Sandy to enjoy to the full every hour of her life', and she is absolutely ready to recall in print crazy times like the one when 'she had given some bloke in a silver sports car a blow job all the way along Knightsbridge'. What more natural, then, than to tell the story all the way from limpness to erection to emission, that moment when her heart was 'crowing with a sense of achievement'. And to write it, by a top reporter's masterstroke, in the third person substituting 'Sandy' for 'I', and alternate this with brief flashbacks to some of Knowles's earlier activities. Put in, too, as any true top reporter must, a few bits of foreboding, moments when 'she had woken in the darkened room instantly aware of something . . . so powerfully evil she was cold with sweat'. At the end you've got, surely you must have, what her publisher calls the most remarkable true story ever written?

In fact what you've got is a book of unexampled vulgarity and cheapness. *In Cold Blood* always seemed to me a doubtful enterprise – one, that is, in which the things recounted jarred against the sympathetic chattiness of their telling – but Capote was aware that problems existed in treating such material. As Dostoevsky to Spillane, so is Capote to Fawkes. Whatever may have been interesting about Knowles is not revealed or even suggested here; whatever may be attractive about the top reporter remains in this episode of her life most skilfully hidden.

Tom Paulin

Darling

The Irish World edited by Brian de Breffny *Thames and Hudson* £10.50

Before it became a glossy consumer durable, the landscape was first tundra, then densely wooded. Vegetation rotted in the rainy climate and created vast peat bogs which preserved butter, gold torques and oak trees in a dark pickle. Nomadic tribes lived on a diet of watercress, shamrock and unseasoned venison. Clerical celibacy was uncommon and neighbouring monasteries often engaged in savage faction fights. Monks in their scriptoria designed intricate lettering on vellum, but the sophisticated skills shown in the metalwork and illuminated manuscripts of early Ireland left no traces in folk tradition.

The early Irish were strangely unworldly and though they exchanged objects with the Viking colonies during the 10th and 11th centuries they never adopted a coinage. What they created and held to was a culture of elaborate circles. Everything was circular – the ringed earthworks, the sinuous designs on gold chalices and illuminated texts, even the tombs of dead chieftains and the stone crosses in the graveyards. From the lettering on the Book of Kells to the form of *Finnegans Wake* this spiralling pattern dominated Irish culture. It became a habit of thought, and even nowadays there are Irish historians who believe, like Yeats and Joyce, in gyres and cycles.

On the level of practical politics, however, innumerable efforts were made to impose a pattern of squares and straight lines on the coiling mists of this curious island on the edge of Europe. And here a photograph of the high square keep of a Norman castle in Co. Meath starkly demonstrates the beginnings of Ireland's subjugation. The 'sober waies, politique drifts and amiable persuasions' which Henry VIII recommended his Lord Lieutenant to use to secure the complete submission of the country proved useless, and over the following two centuries various English armies hacked the Irish into submission, imported thousands of settlers and parcelled out the land.

The colonists liked everything but the people: Edmund Spenser, who described Ireland as 'a most rich and plentiful country, full of corn and cattle', considered the extermination of the native Irish. This was partly accomplished after Raleigh's introduction of the potato at the end of the 16th century. As a result, the population first increased enormously and then fell drastically. During the famine years of 1841-

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51 about 11 million people emigrated while 800,000 died as a result of the famine. Much of the landscape was ruined and deserted, and a 'devotional revolution' took place among the dwindling remnants of the population. Many old crafts, customs and pagan practices faded as church attendance rose to a consistently high level (it had previously been as low as 30 per cent in some areas). Nearly half the population lived in wretched one-room cabins with almost no furniture, a mud floor and a roof of soggy thatch. The Penal Laws, enacted by William of Orange, forced Gaelic culture underground, until, by grafting a *fin de siècle* European decadence on to an emerging Irish nationalism, Yeats gave prophetic expression to the forces that were soon to rid part of the country of English domination.

These and other facts can be gleaned from this lavishly uninformative account of 'the history and cultural achievements of the Irish people'. With the exception of Estyn Evans's scholarly contributions, it's a tedious and offensive example of coffee-table Irish pastoralism which concludes with a few opportunist paragraphs on 'the tragedy of Ulster'. Otherwise we're invited to stroll a few miles away from 'a self-conscious permissive society' and enter 'the peaceful mystery of mountains and lakes', a green and darling world which is made even prettier by 'the streak of violence which flashes like quicksilver across the placid island'. As we listen to 'the leprechaun's drollery', we can learn how John F. Kennedy inherited 'an instinct for the jugular from his tough, competitive forbears', and we can entertain a gentle sorrow as this man with 'his wit, his physical beauty' is 'hurried into the pantheon of fallen heroes' – reflex remarks which are unintentionally revealing. Behind them lies a whole cult of murderous sentimental nationalism with its admiration of brute power, bold gunmen and blood sacrifice. There is a cultural determinism which transfers violent death into a pose, a song, a streak of quicksilver.

The tone of many of these essays is somewhere between a tourist brochure and a school magazine which drearily informs us that 'the new generation of Irish poets have a great deal to say and some say it well'. The name of one of them is three times mis-spelt as 'Seamus Heeney', while other poets are praised for brilliance, poetic insight, etc. Samuel Beckett gets marks for 'showing his insight into the absurdity of the human condition', and even a certain Lady Fingal does not go unmentioned – dressed in emerald green tweeds she once presented 'a cigar of Irish manufacture to Edward VII'. Like the authors of this compilation, she had a smiling eye for the export market.

Among this week's contributors:

CLIVE JAMES's recent publications include *Visions before Midnight* (Cape) and *Fan-Mail* (Faber). A book of essays, *At the Pillars of Hercules*, will be published next year.

TOM PAULIN's first book of poems, *A State of Justice* (Faber), came out earlier this year.

HERMIONE LEE is the author of *The Novels of Virginia Woolf* published by Methuen.

Peter Conrad

Untranscribability

The Modes of Modern Writing: Metaphor, Metonymy, and the Typology of Modern Literature by DAVID LODGE *Arnold* £9.50

Criticism used to be an applied science, a practical aid to the reading; now it has triumphantly purified itself of that subordination, despises texts which are drearily 'readerly', and limbers up in the void. The subtlest critics have outgrown literature altogether, and prefer a self-soliciting enumeration of their own skills. David Lodge practises a terminal species of terminological criticism, sharpening his rhetorical terms and exercising his hermeneutic techniques, but more for self-delight than to aid an engagement with literature.

The Modes of Modern Writing does contain a conventional historical argument about modern literature, but that matters less than its para- (or, as Mr Lodge would say, 'meta-') critical quality, its theoretical exhibitionism. Mr Lodge's thesis, encoded in a concrete poem on the book's cover, is that modern writers have renounced metonymy for metaphor – but this is no more than the truism that art has abandoned realism for symbolism, in a new camouflage of jargon. Mr Lodge's apologetic parentheses admit as much: 'In the modernist writers discussed so far we have observed a general tendency to develop . . . from a metonymic (realistic) to a metaphoric (symbolist or mythopoeic) representation of experience.' Strip 'modernist' of its pretentious suffix, cancel out the array of alternatives Mr Lodge produces from his rhetoric-manual, and an argument the publishers commend as 'bold and original' recoils into an innocuous old saw. However, just as in the modern works Mr Lodge admires content exists only to license the antics of form, so the appearance of historical narrative in his own book is no more than a convenience, which exists to provide opportunities for the deployment of new and ever more garish terminology.

Mr Lodge's critical language, distended by pretension, demonstrates the sad law of inflation and devaluation. The ordinary tokens of critical argument have lost all import, and need to be ponderously reflated. The trick generally is to equip them with affixes. The limp and sorry word 'modern' needs one fore and aft: having first been blown out into 'modernist', it then grows another ungainly appendage to become 'postmodernist'. 'Realism' spawns a trio of clamorous alternatives: on the laden shelves of the jargon-market, 'unrealism', 'non-realism' and 'irrealism' compete for our attention. Verbs and adjectives are propped up as substantives: among Mr Lodge's grammatical mutants are the unlovely terms 'transcribability' and 'literality'. On occasion Mr Lodge concedes the irrelevance of this high style of learned obscurantism, as when he calls an Orwell essay (or 'text' to use his jargon word) 'self-sufficient, self-authenticating – autotelic, to use the jargon word', or when he winsomely confides that the portentous terms of his subtitle mean nothing new: the mud in *Bleak House* is 'a kind of metaphorical metonymy, or as we more commonly say, a symbol'. Then why not use the common word? Because jargon is a device for mystification, a mimicry of a value which doesn't exist. Critics these days are a priestly caste who guard their activities by conducting them in a cabbalistic language impenetrable by the laity. Hence Mr Lodge slips every so often into French, a language more amenable to the invention of bogus substantives than our own blunt idiom.

Ceremonial and crypto-Catholic, the style exalts humble nouns into abstract categories by fitting new endings to them. 'Affection' turns into 'affectivity', 'fact' into 'facticity'; the dizziest ascension of all is reserved, however, for 'fiction', which unfurls first into 'fictionality' and then takes flight as 'metafiction'. The novel, lifted aloft by jargon, turns into a supreme fiction. This spectacular etherealisation covers another more reductive process, for Mr Lodge's determination in dealing with the novel is to expel from it all traces of connection with the material world of character, action and circumstance. In his preface he says he always found the novel an offence to his formalism because it insisted on having a dull terrestrial content. Since his conversion to structuralism (accomplished after a reading of the scrip-

FICTION FROM DUCKWORTH

'The most impressive new fiction list of the seventies,' Bill Webb, Literary Editor of the *Guardian*

INJURY TIME Beryl Bainbridge
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GREAT GRANNY WEBSTER Caroline Blackwood
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'A book to gulp at one reading . . . . Her immediacy and surety are masterly.' Paddy Kitchen, *Listener*.

THE SIN EATER Alice Thomas Ellis
Short-listed for the Guardian Fiction Prize
'A cracking pace . . . . very lively, very Duckworth.' Victoria Glendinning, *TLS*.

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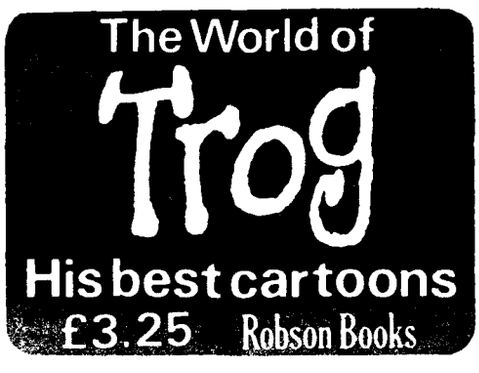
tures of Roman Jakobson), he's found a way of bringing the novel to its knees: 'novels,' he can now declare, 'are made of words', and 'all critical questions about novels must be ultimately reducible to questions about language' – note the sinister admission of 'reducible'. Mr Lodge adds, with the convert's giddy zeal, 'I think [this argument] is irrefutable in theory.' He is mistaken: the refutation should be a kick aimed at the chimerical and baseless quality of the theory, like Johnson's rebuttal of Berkeley. There are things in fiction as solid and irreducible as the stone Johnson kicked, things which are not phantasms of language – Bloom's potato, the contents of Mrs Gamp's pocket, Crusoe's corn husks, even the encrusting mud of *Bleak House*, which Mr Lodge magics away.

The nasty thrill with which Mr Lodge announces that he has reduced novels to figments of language, 'defamiliarising' (his word) the world we know and exterminating character, alerts us to the aggressive dislike of literature which criticism of this kind often betrays. This is criticism as a vengeful decreation. The world exists to be turned into a book; books exist to be interpreted, not to be read. Mr Lodge's favoured texts are those which boast of being 'nonreaderly' (which is to say, in the vernacular, unreadable): *Finnegans Wake* or Gertrude Stein's *The Making of Americans*. Though contemptuous of readers, writers are required to stand in awe of critics, their redeemers, and Mr Lodge issues sharp rebukes to Isherwood, who reveals a reactionary hostility to academic criticism in *A Single Man*, and Thomas Pynchon, whose *V* impiously 'mocks interpretation'. Various humiliations are visited on literature for its stubborn suspicion of criticism. If there's nothing to literature but words, then there are no barriers between it and other, meaner linguistic activities: Mr Lodge therefore exerts himself to demonstrate the literariness of *Guardian* articles and a desk encyclopedia. The most alarming snub threatens to reduce literature to a symptom of brain disease. Mr Lodge shares Jakobson's admiration for the linguistic inventiveness of patients with speech disorders, and perversely praises Gertrude Stein's refusal to use nouns because it makes literature aspire to the disabled, chaotic condition of aphasia.

English empiricism, it seems from this book, has altogether lost its nerve, and, sooner than risk the accusation of being old-fashioned, has capitulated to the deconstructing, obfuscating hierarchs of what Mr Lodge calls 'the *nouvelle critique*'. Things have come to a pretty pass.



Hermione Lee

Truth to Tell

Journey Into Fire by PATRICIA WRIGHT *Collins* £4.95
The Strike by YVONNE BURGESS *Donker* £3.50
Rite of Passage by SHEILA FUGARD *Donker* £2.75
Mischief and **Rookery Nook** by BEN TRAVERS *W. H. Allen* £3.95 each

Patricia Wright's Cinemascope title does not altogether do her justice, though her 'epic novel of 20th-century Russia' does call out to the popcorn eater in every reader. We settle back as our hero Kolya, the same age as the century, sees the aristocratic world of his family crumble; sternly repressing his urge to be a composer, he joins the army, hails the Revolution – though appalled by its brutality – becomes a Party member (glimpse of Kerensky), a Red Army commander (walk-on part for Trotsky), the director of a state farm (intermission), a victim of the purges (scene with Stalin), a colonel in World War II (close-up of Zhukov) and a protester against the invasion of Czechoslovakia. Meanwhile (soft music) Kolya's growing inability to reconcile his patriotic idealism with the developments in the Party alienates him from his uncompromisingly card-carrying wife. But in the end (loud music) true love survives Stalinism.

A solid, serviceable style jogs us from one terrific event to the next. But, as the cardboard cut-outs are stiffly shifted about in the forefront of this momentous passage of history, a kind of grudging respect grows up for the novel. 'The question must remain', Patricia Wright says in her historical note, 'what made men like him . . . serve the State so loyally in spite of such savage treatment and all the disillusionment that went with it.' Persevering in her research, soberly eschewing undue sensationalism, she pursues that absorbing question, not with finesse, but with conscientiousness and authenticity.

The relation of personalities to politics is more subtly essayed by Yvonne Burgess in her bitter prophecy of doom for South Africa. She uses a non-committal narrative of juxtaposition: a character refers to 'these French anti-novelists, [who] say the world is neither significant or absurd, [who] want to convey only the event itself, not its meaning'. In this tradition, she sets an italicised journalistic account of black guerrilla forces organising a general strike and thereby opening the doors to a communist-backed revolution, against the naturalistic portrayal of a few unhappy characters in Port Elizabeth. The whites are abject specimens: a frustrated middle-aged nurse in a geriatric ward; a lonely widow who looks after an imbecile daughter and is making an anthology of Last Words; a repressed lesbian schoolteacher; and the ineffectual Father Finlay, whose response to demands that the Church should become politically involved is to suggest that 'we could, next year, during Lent, perhaps, have a sort of Awareness Week?' Next year may not come, he is told by the African priest whom he treats like a clown but who transcends that role with a vengeance.

These characters are evidently emblems of a rotting civilisation: the helpless imbecile daughter is called Blanche. As the careful structure of the novel proceeds, their undirected lives are irresistibly encroached on by the italicised march of events. The novel's crudely powerful message is enriched by its stinging account of the Church's failure to combat detribalised superstition or the scepticism of the oppressed: 'If you reach heaven tonight, preacher . . . will you sit next to the Archangel Gabriel? Because here you can't sit next to Mrs Van der Merwe on the bus!'

One of *The Strike*'s middle class blacks came to the city from Sekhukhuneland, where 'his sexual inclinations had proved more primitive' than those of the tribesmen themselves. Sheila Fugard's brief, intense novel is placed here, and undermines South African civilisation not from within but, more daringly, from the vantage point of primitivism. A doctor, hounded from his practice because a crippled girl drowned herself after his hypnosis, journeys to the land of the 'Pedi' tribe to investigate the 'rite of passage', the circumcision of the adolescent leading to a violent, amoral 'limbo' period before manhood. He encounters a hysterical white boy who has fled civilisation after a traumatic homosexual experience. Dr James becomes a witchdoctor, makes the boy undergo the tribal rite, cures him, confesses to him in his turn, and dies. The hostility that arises between father and son, doctor and patient, is also the catharsis of each man's sexual guilt.

The power of this mythic tale stems from its well-sustained, bare, lyric, descriptive voice, which gives the oddly compelling effect of a translation: 'How could I describe the splendour? I examined a sun-baked bone, and peeled back bark from a stick.' But the significance is not merely stylistic. Behind the primitive world loom the cities and townships, the world of Athol Fugard's *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* and of *The Strike*. Life there is so stricken that the only cure may be in primitive ritual, in the I-Ching and the reading of the bones. But, once cured, will the boy stay in Sekhukhuneland? 'I had survived the Wilderness, but I wondered if I would survive the city? Could I take back my truth of the *mpatho* hut, the *kgoro* fire-stick and the *phiri* cairn to Cape Town, Johannesburg or London?' It is also the novelist's predicament: and she makes her 'truth' highly convincing.

But for those city-dwellers with a resistance to myth, epic, or satire, Ben Travers's jolly farces have just been reissued in novel form. In each there is a tremendous hoo-ha, involving sniffling mothers-in-law, sneaking neighbours, unintelligible yokels, wildly impenetrable telegrams ('Cottage all upside down now young man joined her double bed got in yours out also wine bought disgraceful behaviour undoubtedly easy') and acts of god – all over two people who are suspected, but never in the least danger, of going to bed together. Records of a vanished, innocent age.

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ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Benedict Nightingale

In Search of Love

The Country Wife *Olivier*
Sexual Perversity in Chicago *Regent*
Do You Love Me? *Roundhouse*

If there's any play calculated to support Lawrence's suggestion that the spread of the pox crippled British attitudes to sex, it's Wycherley's *Country Wife*. The word is perpetually on the lips of men and women alike, and not only as an oath, significant though that obviously is too. Jealous old Pinchwife keeps his young spouse at home by affecting a fear of what he calls smallpox and we know to be another infection altogether; and Horner is able to sneak half of married London into his bed because he has persuaded the chosen cuckolds that he's been rendered impotent by some malign French mutation of the same scourge. Milady Gonorrhoea and Milord Syphilis may not appear on the cast-list, but they haunt the action, exacerbating the mistrust of and contempt for love so cynically camouflaged by the characters' overblown professions of devotion. Wycherley, more than any of his contemporaries, must surely have been in Lawrence's mind when he wrote that 'to the Restoration dramatist sex is, on the whole, a dirty business, but they more or less glory in the dirt.'

Perhaps it's his glory-hallelujah approach that redeems *The Country Wife* from brutishness. True, the men treat the women as easy pickings to be treacherously won, speedily enjoyed, and callously disposed of: Horner actually thinks of himself as a gamester and his mistresses as so much loose change. The women are no less sexually greedy, though 'honour' and 'reputation' prevent them parading their promiscuity too publicly. Constancy is gained, if at all, by 'good pay'. Love is 'a distemper'. Friendship and loyalty are weaknesses, offering the unscrupulous an advantage. Virtue is 'to cheat those who trust us'. And deception and hypocrisy are so very much the furniture of everyday life that the only safe disguise is the absolute honesty that Harcourt adopts when he's trying to wrest pretty Alathea from the fop Sparkish – the more he protests his love, the more charmed and amused her fiancé becomes. Altogether, it is what the coy slut Lady Squeamish claims it to be, a 'nasty world'; but Wycherley, who might have been expected to dismiss its excrescences with the knowing shrug of the practised voluptuary, takes a strange glee in his main character's exploitation and exposure of it. Horner is a Restoration reincarnation of Volpone, a trickster and lecher whose sacred mission is to show up other people's trickery and lechery. It's a sign of the shifts of morality and taste since Ben Johnson that he should end the play flaunting and triumphant.

Peter Hall's last production actually was *Volpone*, so the similarities of staging here are hardly surprising, if not always happy. One can readily imagine a harsher and uglier *Country Wife*, reminding us more emphatically of the grasping fingers behind the fans, the death's heads beneath the powdered wigs. Jonathan Miller, for instance, would surely have found some more or less clinical way of charting the VD pumping through the play's veins. Alternatively, or perhaps even additionally, it might all be wittier, defter and more detailed in its chronicling of character and a lot subtler than the one piece of 'comic' business gratuitously added here, some heated fumbling by Lady Squeamish behind the hat that Horner has tactfully placed over the evidence of his still-rampant virility. Instead, Mr Hall has opted for speed and simplicity, as he did in *Volpone*, and offers an unaffected but rather loud and extrovert version of the play. Out goes the mincing and wincing that used regularly to disfigure Restoration comedy, smothering the plot with style and reducing even the less effete characters to caparisoned circus ponies who trotted through the metropolitan stardust shrilly neighing 'la'. The finery has disappeared; but so, too, has the finesse.

The production's few and justified extravagances come from Elizabeth Spriggs, a twee, babbling Lady Squeamish, and Ben Kingsley, whose Sparkish can never quite conceal the unlettered yob lurking beneath those big, feathery gestures and operatic snorts and gurgles. Albert Finney's Horner lolls and saunters about insolently enough, but he lacks electricity and did not, I fear, make me laugh much. In fact, my frozen face cracked only twice, each time in a predictable place. One was at the innuendos of the 'china' scene, though not at the joke-labouring climax which ostentatiously brought a porcelain phallus out of Horner's seraglio. The other was at Susan Littler's penning of the celebrated love-letter to Horner himself. Her sly timing matched that of Maggie Smith, which is about as high as praise can go, and it was a pity it had to be wrapped up in so grotesquely unsophisticated an accent – should a 'country-gentlewoman', to quote the text, really speak like someone plucked from behind the grocery counter of a village with a higher than usual quota of idiots?

The priapic ad for *Sexual Perversity* that enlivened the NS last week may have given new meaning to the phrase 'hard sell', but it was a mite misleading. The product on offer is actually David Mamet, a sensitive young American dramatist with a special gift for nimble, nifty dialogue. The first half of his double-bill, *Duck Variations*, turns out to be a conservationist threnody delivered in a gently Runyonesque style by a mid-Western Dud and Pete, perched beside the pollution of Lake Michigan; and it isn't until the second part that sex begins to steam out of the floorboards, and then to the most moral effect. *Perversity* is about a fragile, innocent affair that cracks up for reasons which should probably be clearer, but seen mainly to involve the baleful influence of the lovers' soi-disant friends. A swaggering stud with a swingeing hatred for women and (no doubt) concealed homosexual leanings – a latter-day Horner, if you like – sets off his author's taste-buds like a mouthful of ratsbane.

Do You Love Me? seems to be the week's theme, and it's odd that the one piece which explicitly raises the question should so often lose sight of it. It is Edward Petherbridge's adaptation of R. D. Laing, a whimsical revue almost entirely lacking the intellectual intricacy and bite of the psychiatrist-seer's well-known *Knots*. Much of it is set in an art-gallery, for totally obscure reasons. Some is sheer mystification – 'Is there a unicorn in your eyes? Tell me no lies!' Sometimes an exasperating cuteness takes over, as when clockwork figures escape from their glass cases and mime out their tinny emotions. The pleading and wrangling that surely ought to be the evening's centre constantly drift off into tangential little songs or winsome little gags. To say it all lacks definition is gross understatement: it's here, there, everywhere, and (in the end) nowhere at all.

Art

John Spurling

Haptic?

Sculpture in the Park *Regent's Park*
De Kooning *Serpentine Gallery*
Patrick Heron *Waddington and Tooth Galleries II*
The Bible in British Art *Victoria and Albert*

To anyone exercising his dog at the time, the opening of *Sculpture in the Park* must have looked like a funeral. On a raw November day, the rain just holding off, a procession of hunched, well-wrapped figures straggled slowly round the south-east corner of Regent's Park, stopping at intervals to form a respectful ring around each of six newly-erected monuments. It was really an occasion for celebration. How often has one lamented the absence of any sculpture but the worst in the Royal Parks? In the short space of a year Baroness Birk has formed a committee and changed all that. These six pieces are not permanent installations, but surely establish a permanent principle.

Barbara Hepworth's *Conversation with Magic Stones* and Phillip King's *Sculpture 74* were both included in the Battersea show this summer, but neither, in those crowded conditions, appeared at its best. King's – a large block of eroded concrete set about

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with short girders and supporting a kind of triangular sail of rusty steel mesh – was dwarfed there by Henry Moore and Tim Scott on the same lawn. Here, in a corner by itself, it seems at once larger and lighter, a combination of solidity and delicacy to compare – in its unlikely materials – with the tree growing nearby. Hepworth's mini-Stonehenge, consisting of three angular menhirs and three polyhedrons, sits on a small knoll among holly-trees and looks as if it had been there since long before the Romans; a pity if it should be moved again. The druidical weather suits it, but I suspect that on a summer day its Greek ancestry would be as obvious as its Celtic.

Willem de Kooning's bold, bright paintings, in which the leering faces and spread-eagled limbs of blowsy ladies can be just discerned, make one feel at first that his recent expansion into sculpture is fundamentally misconceived. Why try to make bronze figures that look like mud-pies when your artistic forte is the direct sensuality of colour and the lack of depth, solidity or hard outline? After a while one discovers the same raffish sense of humour in both paintings and sculptures – if the former are barmaids blown like old roses, the latter are drunken peasants from Dutch genre pictures emerging gloomily from the dyke into which they have fallen on the way home. Beyond the amusement, though, there is not much, in spite of Andrew Forge's catalogue rhapsody about 'this spontaneous haptic engagement with clay'.

One of the best things in the Cornwall exhibition which I reviewed in my last was a large early painting by Patrick Heron. It was figurative – two people in a room overlooking a harbour – but overlaid with a maze of fluid lines, within which the colours were contained like fragments of a stained-glass window. In Heron's more recent abstract paintings the colours remain rigorously discreet, although they have long since lost their enclosing lines. Floating shapes, as of a broken coastline or pieces of stylised seaweed, repel or offer to enclose one another over a luminous ground. The paintings are cheerful, welcoming, almost hail-fellow-well-met, but one sighs for those early complications. It is time somebody – why not the Serpentine? – gave Heron a retrospective.

The Bible in British Art is anticlimaxed by a selection of drawings for the 1968 *Oxford Illustrated Old Testament*. It would be better perhaps to take the exhibition the wrong way round, since it is clear that the Bible has not mattered much to British artists since the Middle Ages. Look at the exquisitely drawn Noah's Ark – a three-storey house on a Viking hull – in the Anglo-Saxon *Caedmon* manuscript; or Elijah's chariot rising on a swift diagonal against a purple ground towards a heaven of red, green and blue stripes in the earliest English Romanesque Bible; or de Brailes's initial letter to the Book of Job – God seated inside against a golden wall, while Satan in a grass skirt bargains with Him from lower down the margin; or the drowned animals floating beneath the Ark (a crow picking at the eye of a horse) in the 14th century *Holkham Picture-Book*. After the Reformation only Blake saw the Bible so freshly again.

Television

Julian Barnes

Knut-Cracker

Occasionally, some quite decent-sized questions come crawling out of wainscoting. Three weeks ago, for instance, Jonathan Dimbleby on *This Week* interviewed Chilean trade union leaders in full face, with their names on the screen (the ordinary people he interviewed were unnamed backs of heads). Last week, two of the trade unionists (along with many others) were arrested. Was it because of the film, despite the film, or regardless of the film? Presumably, the two must have weighed their chances, and decided that the likelihood of arrest was smaller if they were filmed openly. But how was the decision made? Was it – and should it be – only theirs? These are some of the questions *This Week* won't be covering this week – because the wagon train has moved on, to Biko, Libya, Rhodesia; if it's Friday, this must be Bermuda. Why can't current affairs programmes be asked to give end-of-term reports, explaining what they did, and why, and what happened afterwards? Or would that be imputing a giddying degree of influence to television?

What happens afterwards rarely gets told, unless it's hap-hap-happy. What about, say, the effects of TV's indecent interference in the healthy fantasy lives of perfectly normal people? Nowadays, I hardly dare confide my own particular dreams to anyone, for fear that the news will spread and Jim'll fix it for me, or Esther will bear me off between her teeth into the swirling searchlights of *The Big Time* (BBC-1). When it's merely an up-market version of *New Faces*, this show is harmless enough. But what about when it actually fulfils fantasies, when it short-circuits real life? This week's victim was Lol Cottrell, a capable Sunday footballer and Kopite who longed to play for the 'Pool and was given his chance last season thanks to Esther. He trained for a fortnight under Tommy Smith, the amiable Bardolph of League soccer, lost miserably little flab despite wearing a special polythene vest, and took over from Ray Kennedy in a testimonial match. Interviewed beforehand, the dourly agreeable Lol confessed his dream of the night before: he's allowed to take a free kick just outside the box, runs up, and curls it into the top left-hand corner of the net. In the match itself, with the score 3-3 and two minutes left, he was allowed to take a penalty: he hit it amateurishly high and wide, the referee ruled that the keeper had moved, and his second kick was saved. *That's* reality; and the cruellest comment afterwards was the most kindly meant – Kevin Keegan's 'I think next year they could have a new star here'. They do – he's called Kenny Dalglish.

Lol wasn't the only one wrapping himself in polythene and escaping reality this week. The prize-winning pilot of the first man-powered flight over a set course was enclosed in the stuff on *Horizon* (BBC-2). (Good news? Another human dream come true? Hardly: as the programme demonstrated despite itself, man-powered flight is currently only feasible if you're a luggageless racing cyclist pedalling flat out a few feet above the ground in a windless Californian valley.) President Bokassa undoubtedly *would* have encased himself in polythene if the Parisian designers who relieved him of a substantial part of the Central African Republic's GNP had suggested that it was *the* latest thing which every emperor who *was* an emperor just *had* to be seen wearing. In fact, for his £16 million self-coronation, Papa Bok settled for just the toga and the standard solid-gold eagle-style throne. How different from the home life of our own dear Emperor, Jack Jones, who delivered this year's *Richard Dimbleby Lecture* (BBC-1). Displaying his customary passionate moderation, he condemned avoidable strikes, violence and poverty; and applauded industrial peace, local involvement, wider democracy (quoting Milton) and the demystification of management. Who should fear a portion of his rule?

The general level of fine taste and style displayed by Bokassa was on a par with that in the *Silver Jubilee Royal Variety Gala* (ATV), which Bob Hope twice wittingly called 'America's salute to the Queen'. As with *Miss World*, there were times when the home viewer felt *de trop*. The last time Hope compèred over here, you might recall, was at the *Miss World* meat-market of 1970, when sensible women flour-bombed him and he responded by claiming that they must be on drugs. This time, you didn't need to wait for the credits ('Bob Hope appeared by courtesy of Texaco') to detect the rabid conservatism underlying his chatter. He told us what to feel about the Middle East, invited us to congratulate ourselves on our joint traditions of 'freedom and liberty', and only went wrong with some Jewish jokes: 'Sadat kept his opening remarks brief, because he knew you don't get anywhere in Israel as a ham' was received with a barely concealed hiss. The other surprise in this three-hour butt-acher was Paul Anka: how come *that* voice, the voice of the boy who sang *Diana*, is now issuing from this nut-brown face-lifted Sinatra?

Fortunately, duty and refuge lay on BBC-2, with the first part of the new 'Classic Serial, Knut Hamsun's *Benoni and Rosa*. One thing to be said for this six-parter is that you won't meet many people complaining, 'Well, she's not *my* idea of Bramaputra . . .'; or, for that matter, TV critics eager to show they've read the original novels. There was a sticky start – dubbed Norwegian extras saying 'helpful' lines like 'Now you be careful, Benoni don't forget Miss Rosa's engaged to Nikola the sexton's son' – and patches where the best acting came from drying fish, glowing horse-shoes, period buckets and after-dinner pipes like oboes. But the awkward courtship by dogged, nervous Knut Husebø – a fledgling von Sydow – of the glacially come hither Unni Evjen (Rosa) gradually gathered in attention and sympathy. Unni looks a the moment as if she's going to prove a Knut-cracker; but that's only a guess from an unread critic.

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Radio

Eric Korn

Inside Job

I hadn't realised what a noisy book *The Pickwick Papers* is. Time and again, in the BBC's faithful twelve-part adaptation (Radio 4, Sundays and Tuesdays), the incomparable prose gets blasted away by explosions of merriment, and in the general uproar I feel guilty about having less fun than anyone else. Only Paul Chapman's Jingle is as vivid on the air as on the page.

Saturday Night Theatre (Radio 4) wants to make our flesh creep, with a variety of more or less probable menaces. It has a long tradition: I remember endless Forties dramas about lighthouse keepers going up the wall, which established the tradition that all a sound effects department needs is a wind machine, one seagull and waves of various sizes. Some of these were busy in David Hopkins's absurd *The Double Takeover*. Sterling Cockney Billy Hope has a scapegrace brother Jimmy who has fallen into the clutches ('Got 'isself involved in a bit of villainy, dinne') of some ludicrous Brooklyn Mafiosi ('Dese guns ain't toys'), who have unspeakable designs on Billy's scrapyard. In a daft dénouement in the Scilly Isles, ponderously footnoted for the airwaves ('If we're very quick and quiet *we'll* get in *there*, while *they're* in *here*') Cosa Nostra is routed by sturdy Cornish folk, and there is time for a fraternal confrontation to reveal that all the time Jimmy was the strong one, who has been taking the rap to preserve his brother's illusions about their father, a leaden irony familiar from all those Hollywood Cain-and-Abel fables of the Fifties.

Eric Saward's *Dog Tooth* was less pretentious but also dotty, the dots in question being microdots concealed in an unauthorized and subtly changed copy of a typescript novel found at the Scene of the Crime. 'This manuscript was destined for the Kremlin', they explain, and one wonders, as so often, why the information wasn't sent on a postcard, where it would be less liable to interception. Ah, but this is actually an international neo-Nazi plot to incriminate one of their own members; high-level conspirators are exposed ('It means . . . chaos, Inspector') by a dogged detective and his mate from the Polizei. Lively stuff, and the imagination is tickled by the expertise available in the Bureau of Forensic Literature, where they identify the novel's author on stylistic grounds. ('This autobiography', one can hear them saying 'I think it's an inside job.')

The next week, *SNT* touched on an anxiety widely enjoyed – the dangers of the abuse of computerised information: specifically, its misuse by a cabal of occult cultists to further the aims of Sharif, the evil Grand Templar, by the application of 'the J procedure', intended (credibly enough) by the Home Office for expediting the departure of foreign troublemakers. *Number Discontinued* (from Margaret Simpson's novel *Sorry, Wrong Number*) provided good paranoia-fuel when old Derek, benign as an Archer, finds his lights and water cut off and his bank account sequestrated, because he's somehow offended a member of the coven. A call to head office yields one of the creepier moments: 'I'm afraid we cannot discuss this matter on the phone. It is our policy to leave this to your friendly local bank manager. I'm afraid we cannot discuss this on the phone. It is our policy . . .' It's Saturday night, though, so there's a happy ending.

Drama Now (Radio 3, moveable) is more flexible, various and unpredictable. *Apple in the Eye*, by Canadian novelist Margaret Hollingsworth, gave Liza Ross some rich opportunities as Gemma, a quietly disintegrating housewife who has absorbing conversations with an imaginary fruit, a contrast to her all-too-unimaginary spouse ('My husband Martin has a doctorate in artificial intelligence'). He shows his sympathy with remarks like 'You're pulling your little funnies again, aren't you?' – unforgivable in one so bad in bed. Peter Tinniswood's *A Touch of Daniel* preserved many of those bizarre descriptive felicities – 'a cool November morning aghast with bacon fat' – while leaving room for the character-development of divers clamorous stoics whose object in life seems to be to manufacture situations in which improbable utterances may justifiably be uttered, such as 'How can there ever be a basis of trust when you are leading a secret life with an owl?' or 'Fancy semaphoring ballock-naked at his age. No wonder Morse code's got a bad name.' Stephanie Turner did particularly well as Pat: 'Oh ,Carter, you're so positive', she enthuses, grinding the wretch still further underfoot. Another capsule observation would do well for Tinniswood's epitaph (long may it be premature). 'He was a student of human nature; well, there wasn't much else to study since they put down the dachshunds.'

Remarkably, David Mamet's *Duck Variations* got a hearing on *Drama Now* before the stage première. These quirky, understated duologues between an ornithological Alf Garnett and his more philosophical sidekick, have a charm which quickly grows on the listener and then as quickly stops. Quack philosophy ('the duck's life is not all hearts and flowers: fleas, lice, delusions, sexual problems, chain stores and of course the blue heron . . .') has its limitations: but Mamet's ear is essentially microphonic.

Ian Dougall, in *Ann* (Radio 3), took up the perilous challenge of writing a soliloquy to accompany De Quincey's heightened prose, and brilliantly succeeded. Since De Quincey romanticises his friendship with the teenage prostitute, it was just that she should be portrayed as shrewder and more romantic than the 'gentleman schoolboy on the run from tigers of the mind'. Angela Pleasence caught it all.

Anthony Smith has a radio talent of high order. The formula of *A Sideways Look At . . .* (Rado 4, Mondays 9.15 p.m.) is both constricting and misleading (since what he is doing is looking straight where most people look askew): but I hadn't expected to laugh aloud repeatedly at a discussion of the European standard electric plug.

Films

John Coleman

Not So Sunny

Hyenas' Sun (AA) *Minema*
67 Days (AA) *EMI International*

Through the kind of professional disorganisation only likely to occur in our own distribution channels, which cheerfully clog one another to death, there is an unfair old quantity of movies coming into the metropolis around Xmas – some of which I have already seen but are embargoed for the moment. Let us pray that it will not prove to be an 'X'-mas, at least. Meanwhile, there is a stunningly shot and intelligently conceived first feature, a sort of anti-travel brochure, by a Tunisian-born director of French education or *formation* Ridha Behi, just 30, is a small, alert unassuming man with a couple of short films behind him as well as a master's degree in sociology from Nanterre and a Parisian doctorate. He wrote and directed *Soleil des Hyènes*, or *Hyenas' Sun*, a project carried out against hostile odds and interests, and a round of applause is in order. It is a sort of exotic requiem for a village, a North African fishing community, taken over and exploited to the spiritual death of its inhabitants by some slick German entrepreneurs. Behi, enormously well served by his Dutch cameraman, Theo van de Sande, mixes document and fiction, local faces and a few professional actors, into a crafty *Which*'s brew: think, those of you with liberal leanings, before lightly embarking on a Morocco-bound fortnight in the sun. The piece comes, in a sense, in two halves and is often photographed accordingly: the hard, traditional day-to-day life of the villagers and the colour-supplement transformation that overtakes it. It is about the old and the new, about greed supplanting honour, done with a satirical grasp of the difficult issues involved that recalls the unsentimental work of the Senegalese Ousmane Sembene (*The Money Order, Emitai, Xala*, to name those I have seen to date), pained studies of transition, corruption, civilisation as we know it thrusting aside communal ties and holdings.

Many images are beautifully found, too many, some might argue. Women in black, silhouetted on a skyline, are soon to become undignified hotel servants and worse. The fishermen, forced from their boats and nets, try an abortive strike but succumb to jobs as building labourers. A hitherto respected blacksmith opens a trashy gifte shoppe; Teutons cavort in the warm surf; a local starts camel-rides on the sands. Workers watch like refugees through a wire fence as a venal dignitary cuts a ribbon, opening 'this complex'; men haul on a rope maintaining a palm tree upright while imported white model girls pose before cameras for a commercial; an idiot with horrid teeth howls and howls with

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mirthless laughter in a cave. This last image nearly concludes the sad story, which ends on a shot of a tourist's delight of a sun (or was it moon?) over the glinty sea. There is certainly something adrift in the pacing of events, so that one is left feeling uneasy about the splice between past and present rhythms. The ochre-tones of back-streets or alleys, an early bloody birth-scene, the flounders of beached fish and the poor, stately rituals of men – about to be psychically emasculated – holding solemn converse over tea: the switch from this bleached matter of well-water and women slapping laundry on stones and everything primitive and formalised is more than a shade abrupt. But then to the people unwillingly jerked into a world of chic and *fric* it probably felt, and feels, like this. The Yugoslav *67 Days*, celebrating a frighteningly heroic historic moment when Nazis and Chetniks took arms against a sea of Tito-led partisans, is a disgraceful, cliché-cluttered bore, leaving me more dead than Red.

Music

Andrew Clements

Underscored

Two major works by Brian Ferneyhough have now been heard in London this year. In April I wrote about his *Sonatas for String Quartet* on its first British performance at the ICA; the London Sinfonietta's recent performance of *Transit* was a more glamorous affair. If the number of modern-music cognoscenti in the audience is anything to go by, Ferneyhough has finally made it in Britain, after eight years of self-imposed exile in Switzerland and Germany.

So far as any two pieces can, the *Sonatas* and *Transit* give a fairly accurate idea of the scope of his achievement to date. Each is crucial to a phase in his development. The *Sonatas* (1967) is a working-out of the implications of Webern's methods on the largest possible scale; Ferneyhough's music of the Sixties can perhaps best be seen as a gradual coming to terms with the legacy of post-Webernian serialism. *Transit* was written between 1972 and 1974 and followed several comparatively unproductive years. A reassessment of his artistic stance led to works in which the formal outlines of the music are more straightforward – the discursive mosaic of a piece like *Sonatas* is replaced by large blocks of material, as intricately worked as ever, but more easily perceived in structural terms. Now, though his works are imbued with a host of extra-musical implications, elaborations of Ferneyhough's own wide-ranging philosophical and cultural interests.

So *Transit*, for six vocalists and a chamber orchestra of 39 players, comes complete with a complicated subtext of metaphysical allusion. The starting point was a 19th-century pastiche woodcut depicting a Renaissance magus contemplating the infinity of space; he is firmly rooted to the earth but is able to perceive the mechanics of the heavens. Ferneyhough extends the metaphor: the work concerns itself with mediating between the extremes of material diversity and mystical unity and with the implications of the *transitio* from an anthropocentric universe to a spiritual one. The three texts that provide the vocal material reflect this progress – from the alchemical writings of Paracelsus, via Heraclitus on the perpetual regeneration of the earth through fire, to a neo-Platonist tract on the nature of eternity.

You might reasonably wonder how much of this is relevant to your comprehension of the work itself, particularly when the texts themselves are so embedded in the musical textures as to be only rarely comprehensible. Ferneyhough does not help matters. His programme note for the Sinfonietta performance was almost deliberately opaque and his introductory lecture (billed as an 'open rehearsal') hardly more enlightening. His mind has a very Germanic cast and he is inclined to express himself in terms that do not lend themselves to anglicisation.

His programme notes are heavy going, but thankfully the musical structure is vivid and easy to grasp. The presentations of the three texts are interpolated between more densely scored orchestral tuttis which culminate in the final shattering *transitio*, and three 'verses', each a mini-concerto for an amplified woodwind instrument. The music moves from extreme dichotomy at the outset to a hard-won unity at the close, an almost Brucknerian progress, particularly when the unification is achieved through the heavy brass. Yet along the way the music incident is varied and astonishingly imaginative: the journey seems at least as important as the arrival.

The performance conducted by the composer was heroic. Whether the Elizabeth Hall is a big enough auditorium for the work is questionable. In the score, Ferneyhough specifically divides the orchestration into tiered circles of instruments, mirroring the interlocking spheres of the woodcut. The music then can be heard moving outwards, from the inner ring of vocalists and woodwind to the ultimate, unifying heavy brass which become more and more prominent as the work reaches the final shattering climax. The QEH stage is simply too small for these circles to be clearly differentiated; one element of the work was lost and perhaps some of the textures were less sharply defined as a result. A small point, in the context of a performance of as exciting a new orchestral work as has been heard in London for some while.

Christopher Reid

The Haiku Adapted for Home Use

I
Ionescoesque,
these pens and papers
have taken over the desk.

II
Water down the drain.
I sit, dangling my monocle
from the plug-chain.

III
This carpet is in tatters –
almost like the trail
of a peacock's tail.

IV
Pimpled like lizards,
the gherkins plumb
the depths of their aquarium.

V
A clipper rounds the cape.
Something drops overboard –
of a crescent shape.

VI
A twirly dragonfly
attacks a tin:
it is trying to break in.

VII
The ghosts of spiders lurk among
the fraying curtains
they themselves hung.

VIII
A flying rose
of crumpled paper
lands in my basket, where it grows.

Weekend Competition

No 2493 **Set by Snubbin**

The book-signing racket has now got completely out of hand, what with Ted's train and similar stunts. Competitors are invited to counter with a dust-wrapper résumé of an (imaginary) author's career which is so subtly off-putting that even the most sycophantic reader would remain untempted to go and meet him. About 120 words; by 23 December.

Result of No 2490 **Set by Paddy Field**

We asked for advertisements for brides – in verse.

Report **by PC49**

Reference the Report No 2488 by a certain person, not unknown to the security forces operating in the environs of the complex who goes under the alias of Little Keith The said Report contains many inaccuracies, some of a libellous character, not least about yours truly. A 'pitiably lowly member' of the force, indeed? Well, some of us have had more hot dinners, I can tell you The file on 'Mr' Keith is, as we say in the force, still open: from now on, he won' even be able to cut his fingernails withou one of the lads in blue sending them t forensics to look for substances.

Reference Comp No 2490: whilst pro ceeding with the judging, I observed tha only Mr Sidesaddle managed, as you migh put it, to spot the villain most likely t

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advertise in the indicated manner. Seven sweeteners to Mr Sharpless and Mr Fagg (no Partridge as both gentlemen have already been fitted out with one); five each to the rest.

It's no go the Hite Report, it's no go
the Libbers,
All I want is a nubile wench to fetch my
carpet slippers.

Computer dating sounded fine, I gave 'em
all the info,
Got fixed up with a one-armed schizoid
Serbo-Croat nympho;
Did my damnedest in the circs to play
the perfect lover,
Found out pretty soon there wasn't any need
to bother.

It's no go the fat ones, it's no go the lean,
All I want is sympathy and a trip down
mammary lane.

It's no go your feelthy pix, it's no go Lolita,
It's no go the pantie adverts on the escalator,
It's no go the French lessons, it's no go
the saunas,
All I want is a female friend who's ready to
cut corners.

STANLEY J. SHARPLESS

Come live with me and be my M/S
And earn a princely bonus, *viz*:
The charm of my society,
Whose scintillant variety
Will momently reveal why I
Am just the sort of modest guy
Who (serious but *never* solemn)
Employs the STATESMAN's 'Personal Column'
To itemise his giant ego
(Constructed out of psychic Lego);
Then sits and broods and wonders why
No dolly ever *dare* reply . . .

MARTIN FAGG

A young ex-beauty queen required,
By Salt Lake City ex-church-head,
Change of employment now desired,
Willing to supply own chains and bed.

WAYNE SIDESADDLE

One doesn't like to advertise oneself,
But actually I've quite a bit of pelf –
And shall have more, unless one Hamilton
Rouses the peasants: I'm the eldest son.
With no death duties and no tax to pay,
Little work and not a little play.
One should be eligible don't you think –
I'm not yet thirty and still in the pink?
The snag is, it takes time to master polo,
Yet I don't want to spend my dotage solo;
So if you are a virgin, C. of E.,
And out of the top drawer, contact me.

ROGER MARGISON

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Health
Looks
Books
Lust
Trust
Wit
Knit
Pad
Trad
Romp
Comp

V. F. CORLEONE

Tony Miles

Chess

No 62 **Korchnoy-Spassky**

With the final of the candidates' matches scarcely begun Viktor Korchnoy has already established a commanding lead. After having the better of the drawn first games he won both the second and the third against the ex-world champion Boris Spassky. His recent form (he won five of his first seven games against Polugaevsky in the last round) is reminiscent of Fischer in 1971, and if he continues like this he may well do what not so long ago seemed impossible and provide a severe test for Karpov.

Spassky, on the other hand, has already used up a substantial amount of good fortune reaching this stage. He finished half way down the Manila Interzonal and was only given a place in the Candidates' when Fischer declined to take part. Then in the crucial game of his first round match Hort lost on time in a winning position, and in the semi-final he had to come from behind twice to beat Portisch. Now it seems his luck has run out.

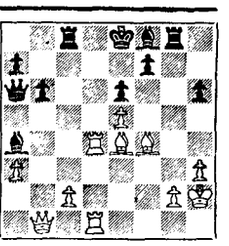
White: B. Spassky **Black: V. Korchnoy**

(Second game)

1. P-K4, P-K3; 2. P-Q4, P-Q4; 3. N-QB3, B-N5; 4. P-K5, P-QB4; 5. P-QR3, B x Nch; 6. P x B, N-K2; 7. Q-N4. The sharpest line of the Winawer Variation, and one which is not often seen nowadays. **7 . . . P x P; 8. Q x NP, R-N1; 9. Q x P, Q-B2; 10. N-K2, QN-B3; 11. P-KB4, B-Q2; 12. Q-Q3, P x P.** A fascinating and complex position. White has the bishop pair, an outside passed KRP which will come in handy if he survives to an ending, and he can pick off the QBP at will. On the other hand his king has no safe place and black is much better developed. In his exhaustive monograph on the line John Moles takes this as the starting position for seven chapters of analysis – and still fails to reach a conclusion! **13. B-K3.** Moles gives this a '?' describing it as natural-looking but bad. It certainly seems natural to want to blockade Q4. **13. . . . P-Q5.** A new move, apparently. Black gives up his QP and QBP to open lines onto the white king. Previously . . . N-B4; 14. B-B2 and only then P-Q5 had been played. **14. B-B2.** on 14. N x QP presumably black would continue with N x N; 15. B x N, 0-0-0 followed by B-B3 and N-B4 with a strong initiative. **14. . . . 0-0-0; 15. N x QP.** If white does not take the pawn he has a poor position. **15. . . . N x N; 16. Q x N, P-N3; 17. B-R4, B-N4; 18. Q-K4, B x B; 19. R x B, R-Q4; 20. B x N, Q x B; 21. R-B3, K-N1.** Not . . . Q-R5ch; 22. K-B1, Q x RP?? 23. R-R3. **22. K-B1.** White must try to get his king to safety. **22. . . . R-Q7; 23. R-B2, R(1)-Q1; 24. Q-B3, R x Rch; 25. K x R, R-Q7ch; 26. K-N3.** If 26. K-B1, Q-B4. **26. . . . Q-Q1.** Threatening R x P and if 27. Q x P, Q-N1ch. **27. Q-K4, Q-N1ch; 28. K-R3, Q-R1ch; 29. K-N3, Q-N2ch; 30. K-R3, R-Q1; 31. P-N4, R-R1ch; 32. K-N3, Q-R3; 33. Q-N2, Q-R5ch; 34. K-B3, R-Q1; 35. Q-N3, Q-K2; 36. P-N5, R-Q7; 37. K-N4, Q-N2; 38. Q x P.** Equivalent to resignation, but 38. R-KN1, Q-K5 (or even R x BP; 39. Q-Q3, R-N7ch); 39. Q x BP (39. Q-B3, Q x BP), R-B7; 40. Q-KN3, Q-B4ch; 41. K-R5, R x Pch; 42. Q x R, Q-R2ch wins. **38. . . . R-N7ch; 39. K-R3, R-B7; 40. K-N4, Q-K5 Resigns.**

Problem 62

White to play. How should the game go? Answers to me at the NS postmarked not later than 20 December.



Solution to Problem 60

1. . . . R-B2! 2. P-N5! (not 2. Q x R, Q-B6ch or 2. R x R, Q-Q8 mate) and now either 2. . . . Q-Q8ch; 3. R x Q, R x Q with a drawish ending or 2. . . . Q-K7!? 3. R x Pch! K x R! 4. Q x Rch, K-N1! 5. Q-Q8ch draw.

Weekend Crossword 1245

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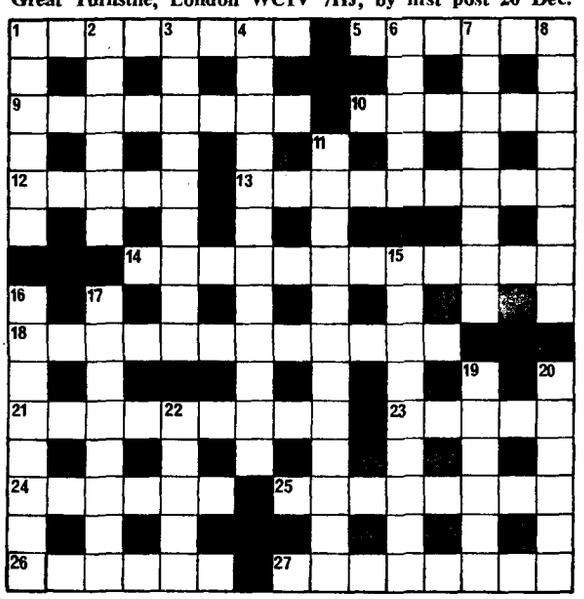


ACROSS

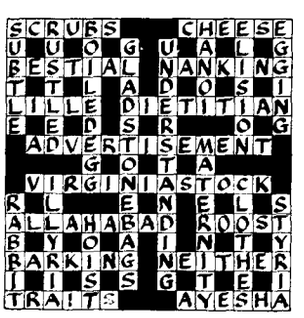
1. Ineffective person makes a fortune embracing the wrong dame (4, 4).
5. The vehicle a boy is backing is a destroyer (6).
9. Empty words with which to applaud the role when making a comeback (8).
10. Give a person what sounds like credit for prophecy (6).
12. The island has no priest (5).
13. Nobody's diarist (9).
14. Plump female shape will do for trusted elder (6, 6).
18. Weighed down by turning the bed under and over (12).
21. Postponement to take the excitement out? (9).
23. Where there is a contest you need a period in retreat (5).
24. In vacation I anticipate learning some Greek (6).
25. A bit of the coastline which is capital territory (8).
26. 'My precious Lily! My imperial ——!' (Carroll) (6).
27. Criminal skills return after a moulding (8).

DOWN

1. In the final act I crave a glass of milk (6).
2. My holding a jumble sale is paltry (6).
3. My hard bit may be found in an ancient hymn (9).
4. How to make shores, but not if you do it halfway across (6, 6).
6. Collect for a service (5).
7. Stuff worn away when the duster is shaken round it (8).
8. Aircraft which makes one shut up and take notice (8).
11. A number of apprehensions about the novel (4, 8).
15. Northerner puts spirit into mixture of cider (9).
16. Practise deception, giving admiral victory over king (8).
17. Speed under sail partially gives us a tie (8).
19. Where one girl embraces another (6).
20. Composer of rich and elemental music (6).
22. Author mostly studied (5).

SETSQUARE

Solution to No 1243



Prizewinners to No 1243

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Courses— continued from page 832

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NEW STATESMAN

Vol. 94 No. 2438

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Theatres

ALDWYCH THEATRE (Royal Shakespeare Company) 836 6404. Recorded booking info 836 5332. Jonson's 'The Alchemist', 'The Comedy of Errors'. See daily press for dates and times. RSC also at The Warehouse at Donmar Theatre with: Edward Bond's 'The Bundle' and Howard Barker's 'That Good Between Us' (unsuitable for children). Also at Piccadilly Theatre in 'Wild Oats' and Savoy Theatre in 'Man and Superman'.

ALMOST FREE. 485 6224. 'A Pinprick of History' by Margarette D'Arcy. Mon.-Sat. 1.15 p.m. until 23 Dec. (Opening Mon.).

HAMPSTEAD THEATRE. 722 9301. 'The Elephant Man' by Bernard Pomerance. Re-opens Mon. 5 Dec. 8 p.m. 'A compulsive & beautiful play' . . . Times. 'Not to be missed' . . . Guardian.

NATIONAL THEATRE. 928 2252. 'The Madras House', 'Volpone', 'The Country Wife', 'The Plough & The Stars', 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight', 'The Lady from Maxim's', 'State of Revolution', 'Richard III part 2', 'Motocar', 'Lavender Blue' & 'Half Life'. See daily press for dates and times or ring 928 2256 for recorded information.

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Meetings

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL: Human Rights Day celebration, Sat. 10 December. Rally Speaker's Corner 2 p.m. with Prisoners of Conscience. Then join the Prime Minister and Steeleye Span, Trafalgar Square, 4-5 p.m.

CENTRAL LONDON FABIAN SOCIETY. Professor Brian Abel-Smith on the Health and Personal Social Services. Wed. 14 Dec. 7.30 p.m. 51 Argyle St. WC1 (Basement of Law Building) nr King's Cross Station. All welcome. Collection.

THE ACCOMMODATION CRISIS. Young Mapam invites you to a meeting with Steve Schifferes, Training/Policy Officer with Shelter. Sunday 11 Dec. 8 p.m. 37 Broadhurst Gdns, NW6. Members 20p, non-members 50p.

CHILD NUTRITION: Talk by Janet McCrae, an experienced field worker in West Africa. Oxfam/Africa Centre meeting at 38 King Street, Covent Garden, 6.30 p.m. Thursday 15 December.

'SENTENCED TO SUCCESS'. Remarkable French trade union supported film shown to the Windscale Inquiry, exploding the myth of nuclear safety. At The Other Cinema, 25 Tottenham St, W1, 15 Dec. 8 p.m. Followed by discussion. Adm. free. Presented by SERA. 01-439 3749.

RAMAKRISHNA VEDANTA CENTRE, Blind Lane, Bourne End, Bucks. (Tel. 06285 26464). Sun. 11 Dec. Swami Bhavyananda on 'The Narada Bhakti Sutras' at 4 p.m. All welc. Vedanta mag. 40p.

BUDDHIST SOCIETY, 58 Eccleston Square, London SW1. Sat. 170 Dec. 3 p.m. 'Open Day'. Tues. 13 Dec. 6.30 p.m. 'Introducing Buddhism'. Wed. 14 Dec. 6.30 p.m. Public Lecture 'A Western Approach to Buddhism'. All welcome. Send s.a.e. for full programme.

COUNCIL FOR ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND DEMOCRACY

AGM: 2.30 p.m., 17 December 1977 in Room 45, LSE, Houghton St, London WC2.
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THEOSOPHY. Informal Forum on Basic Theosophy. Sun. 11 Dec. 8 p.m. All welcome. S.a.e. free pamphlet, talks programme, booklist. ULT, 62 Queen's Gardens, London W2.

Conferences

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